

## EPIC AND TRAGEDY IN VERGIL'S NISUS AND EURYALUS EPISODE

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It is not surprising that R. D. Williams lets Heyne's judgment sum up critical opinion on the story of Nisus and Euryalus: *episodium Aeneidis omnium facile nobilissimum*.<sup>1</sup> Readers have traditionally responded sympathetically to the friendship and courage displayed by the two ill-fated young warriors in Book 9 of the *Aeneid*. Recently, however, critics have concentrated on the complexities within this episode and have discussed the less positive aspects of the two main characters.<sup>2</sup> G. Duckworth in a seminal study observes that the protagonists' desire for military distinction provokes their excessive slaughter and their plunder; as a tragedy "which illustrates the working of free will," the story foreshadows the later actions of characters such as Pallas, Lausus, and especially Turnus.<sup>3</sup> While Duckworth sees the error of individuals who must pay for their actions, G. J. Fitzgerald finds a deeper ideological problem: youth seduced by patriotic values that have no solid basis.<sup>4</sup> Pointing to symbolic language that implies confusion and total loss of critical reflection, he concludes that the "environmental reaction" may be positive, but the reader is meant to become skeptical of such an ethic. Recently, M. O. Lee has discussed Nisus' and Euryalus' friendship in the context of Vergil's complex attitude towards homosexual relationships.<sup>5</sup> Keenly aware of the "obsessive and self-destructive" aspects of the relationship, Vergil shows their foul play and horrible carnage but is sympathetic to the positive aspects of their bond.

<sup>1</sup> *The Aeneid of Virgil, Books 7–12* (London 1973) 291.

<sup>2</sup> For an exception, which presents a more optimistic view of this episode, see P. G. Lennox, "Virgil's Night-Episode Re-examined (*Aeneid* IX, 176–449)," *Hermes* 105 (1977) 331–42.

<sup>3</sup> "The Significance of Nisus and Euryalus for *Aeneid* IX–XII," *AJP* 88 (1967) 129–50.

<sup>4</sup> "Nisus and Euryalus: A Paradigm of Futile Behavior and the Tragedy of Youth," in *Cicero and Virgil: Studies in Honour of Harold Hunt*, ed. J. R. C. Martyn (Amsterdam 1972) 114–37. While agreeing with much of his essay, I differ principally with Fitzgerald's view of Vergil's complete and persistently ironic distance from his material in this episode.

<sup>5</sup> *Fathers and Sons in Virgil's Aeneid* (Albany, N.Y. 1979) 77–79, 109–113.

While these studies have offered important insights into the Nisus and Euryalus episode, the literary background of this story has not been sufficiently analyzed. Scholars have agreed that Vergil modelled this episode on the night-raid of Odysseus and Diomedes in *Iliad* 10. But, while critics have become more aware of the influence of Greek tragedy upon the *Aeneid*,<sup>6</sup> only one has perceived the importance of Euripides' *Rhesus* as a second literary model for this episode. B. Fenik discusses the differences between the drama and the Homeric passage and examines elements of Euripides' plot, language, and characterization that Vergil seems to have drawn upon.<sup>7</sup> In general, he considers that Euripides improved upon Homer dramatically by developing character and motivation more fully and by adding certain dynamic qualities to the plot, such as the disarray in the enemy camp and the discovery of the two warriors by their foe; Vergil then took advantage of these changes but eliminated much of the cynicism in the *Rhesus*.

This paper will explore further the function of the two literary models in the Nisus and Euryalus episode. For Vergil's use of Euripides as well as Homer raises important problems of consistency. While the *Rhesus* frequently recalls the Doloneia and presumes a familiarity with Homer's work, Euripides' play pessimistically expresses a sense of futility about human endeavor. It suggests the inadequacy of logical reasoning in a world filled with unlikely events and manipulated by amoral divinities.<sup>8</sup> Filled with brilliant images of sleep and dream states, chance, and ap-

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, W. F. J. Knight, *Roman Vergil* (London 1943), esp. 133–40, who has very good observations on the influence of each of the three major Greek tragedians, in particular Euripides. V. Pöschl, "Virgile et la Tragédie," in *Présence de Virgile*, ed. R. Chevallier (Paris 1978) 73–79, has an excellent analysis of the influence of Greek tragedy on the Dido episode especially. M. Wigodsky, *Vergil and Early Latin Poetry* (Wiesbaden 1972) 91–97, reminds the critic of the general difficulty of being absolutely certain that Vergil is indebted to Greek tragedy rather than to Latin translations and renditions of the Greek works.

<sup>7</sup> "The Influence of Euripides on Vergil's *Aeneid*," (Diss. Princeton 1960, resumé in *DA* 21 [1960] 881–82); chapter 7, pp. 54–96, is an extended discussion of the echoes and parallels which Vergil employed from the *Rhesus*. Fenik begins by discussing the problem of Vergil's use of the play that we now possess under the title of *Rhesus* and concludes that the specific verbal echoes of this Euripidean play are conclusive evidence that the Latin poet knew and used it. He assumes that the play is genuinely by Euripides and supports his view with some discussion of typically Euripidean irony (e.g., repetition of words meaning "to know") and the appearance of divinities that are hostile and malevolent. For a lengthy study of the problem of the authenticity of this play, see W. Ritchie, *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides* (Cambridge 1964), who thoroughly examines the available external evidence as well as the internal (e.g., metrics, language, style) and concludes that the work is most likely one of Euripides' earlier plays.

<sup>8</sup> R. E. Braun transl., *Euripides: Rhesus* (New York 1978) 3–17, has an excellent introduction to the themes and imagery of this play. My remarks immediately following on the *Rhesus* are indebted to Braun's discussion. See also Fenik (above, note 7), esp. 84–93.

pearance, this play reflects the uncertain foundations of all human actions. Unlike the Doloneia where Odysseus and Diomedes are independent agents who succeed because of their skill, here they receive extensive help from Athena, who even takes the form of Aphrodite in order to prevent Paris from pursuing the Greeks. Thus the best heroes have become merely pawns of the gods in fulfillment of fate. Euripides' play thus totally undermines the positive heroic ideal in Homer's Doloneia. By imitating the *Rhesus* as a second major model, Vergil does not simply invert Euripides' deep skepticism but instead reveals an uneasy tension between Homeric epic and Euripidean tragedy. But, as I will try to show, his unusual use of form has an important function, for the poet is thereby able to reflect upon the complex values which underlie the world of his poem.

In order to probe the nature and function of *gloria* as a social concept, Vergil incorporates elements from the Doloneia and the *Rhesus* which imply contrasting views. In the world of the Homeric epic, *timê* and *kleos* are the means by which the individual in a martial-oriented society assures his status and extends his reputation into future generations.<sup>9</sup> *Kleos*, or "reputation," may apply to a person in general or to some particular quality which he possesses; significantly, it is awarded to a hero for accomplishing some difficult deed. Valuable possessions or prizes may have a *kleos* of their own and can bestow *kleos* upon the owner. Since *kleos* lasts beyond the grave, the poet perpetuates a man's reputation by singing of the *klea andrôn*. *Timê*, which connotes "honor," "status," or "price," is the measure of a man's worth that the society determines; it was important in an unstable world, where a man captured in battle had a particular value when his relatives tried to ransom him. In the Doloneia, Nestor encourages a volunteer by promising *kleos* and the gift of a sheep from each of the Greek princes as reward. There is thus a balance between social glory and material reward, which in this case has an obvious economic usefulness rather than primarily honorific value. Diomedes, who most thoroughly represents the values of his culture, is the first to offer his services; seeking only to have a companion in order to increase the chances of success, he immediately chooses the most cunning among the Greeks. As the two prepare to set forth, Odysseus prays to Athena for a glorious return after completing their mission (10.281–82). This desire for social glory reflects the values of a shame culture, in which a man is most concerned with the opinion of his peers.<sup>10</sup> The rational Greek protagonists, then,

<sup>9</sup> J. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago 1975) 31–35, has a very good discussion of these social terms. My definitions of *kleos* and *timê* are based on Redfield. See also G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore 1979), esp. 40–41, 118–19.

<sup>10</sup> See E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951), esp. 17–18.

subordinate their desire for *timê* and *kleos* to the public cause of preventing Greek defeat at the hands of the Trojans; they simply expect the glory that their society naturally awards as payment for valiant actions. Unlike the Greeks, the foolish Dolon is motivated by a hubristic desire for personal glory. He dismisses Hector's offer of a chariot and two fine horses and insists upon the chariot and horses of Achilles as reward for his spying mission. Though surprised, Hector agrees, emphasizing the splendor which the man will gain from such a prize (*διαμπερὲς ἀγλαΐεῖσθαι*, 331).<sup>11</sup> Dolon clearly violates the standards of heroic society. Since he is excessively acquisitive and overconfident beyond his merits, the poet shows the utter folly of his quest for glory by depicting his desperate, futile attempts to save himself when captured by Odysseus and Diomedes (10.378–445).

By making important changes in the Homeric material, Euripides takes a very skeptical position on glory in the *Rhesus*. While Homer briefly indicates Dolon's mercenary attitude in his conversation with Hector, the playwright elaborates the scene in which Dolon and Hector discuss the appropriate reward for the scouting mission. The Trojan leader offers the young warrior many valuable gifts before learning of his real desire. Not only does Hector agree; he also admits his own lust for the same prize. Since possession of those famed horses would appropriately enhance the *timê* of Hector as the best of the Trojan heroes, Euripides makes Dolon's aspiration seem all the more foolish by comparison. With an unreflective enthusiasm, the chorus asserts the glory of this venture: *πόνος ἄδ' εὐκλεής* (197).<sup>12</sup> Thus, ignoring altogether Homer's positive references to the *kleos* of Odysseus and Diomedes, Euripides magnifies the picture of Dolon's absurd quest for material glory. At the end of the play, he qualifies all human glory when the Muse prophesies the inglorious death of the best of all heroes, Achilles.

Vergil explores the question of glory in the Nisus and Euryalus episode against the background of Homer and Euripides but reflects a more complex position on glory as a social value. Scholars have observed that Nisus is motivated primarily by his desire for glory.<sup>13</sup> The young warrior acknowledges the *dira cupido* that drives him to seek opportunities for enhancing his reputation: "aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum invadere magnum / mens agitat mihi" (185–86).<sup>14</sup> When he

<sup>11</sup> *Homeri Ilias*, vols. I, II, and III, ed. T. W. Allen (1931; rpt. New York 1979). My citations of the *Iliad* are from this edition.

<sup>12</sup> *Euripidis Fabulae*, Vol. III, ed. G. Murray (Oxford 1909). My citations of the *Rhesus* follow Murray's edition.

<sup>13</sup> See Duckworth (above, note 3) 131; and A. J. Boyle, "The Meaning of the *Aeneid*: A Critical Inquiry, Part II," *Ramus* 1 (1972) 135.

<sup>14</sup> *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford 1969). My citations of Vergil's works come from this edition.

mentions his plan to undertake the mission of sending a message to Aeneas, he is using the public crisis as a means for glory:

“Aenean acciri omnes, populusque patresque,  
exposcunt, mittique viros qui certa reportent.  
si tibi quae posco promittunt (nam mihi facti  
fama sat est) . . . ” (192–95)

While also thinking first of glory, his younger friend is much less restrained: *obstipuit magno laudum percussus amore* (197). Vergil uses strong language to convey the youth's intense response: *obstipesco* denotes a state of being struck senseless with astonishment, and *percutio* implies a violent blow. By speaking in a highly rhetorical style, Euryalus betrays his excessive reaction: “est hic, est animus lucis contemptor et istum / qui vita bene credat emi, quo tendis, honorem” (205–6). There is an element of the pretentious in the exaggerated effect of the anadiplosis with *est*, in the strong connotation of *contemptor*, and in the metaphorical use of *lux* for *vita*; his reference to *magnanimum Aenean et fata extrema* (204, emphasizes mine) reinforces the impression of a character who, perhaps because of his young age, responds excessively, first on the verbal level and later in his uncontrolled slaughter and pillaging.

During the mission itself, Nisus again refers to glory of an individualistic nature. On his escape from the Rutulian force, he discovers that his friend has been apprehended and ponders the right course to follow:

quid faciat? qua vi iuvenem, quibus audeat armis  
eripere? an sese medios moriturus in enses  
inferat et pulchram properet per vulnera mortem? (399–401)

The word *pulcher* can mean “glorious” or “illustrious.”<sup>15</sup> But the glory that Nisus might win by dying for his friend would not be proper social glory. His question reflects his confusion of values, his failure to recall that true glory would come not from accomplishing a private, personal act but from pursuing the public cause. The last clause of Nisus' inner debate significantly echoes a passage in the fourth *Georgic*, where Vergil describes the total dedication of the bees to the welfare of the community. As a metaphor for a political unit, the bees show their collective orientation by their constant efforts for their leader. They honor him in peace and risk their lives for him in battle: “et saepe attollunt umeris et corpora bello / obiectant pulchramque petunt per vulnera mortem” (217–18). As the bees are totally devoted to their community, the poet implies that they receive a kind of communal glory for death on behalf of their king. The Romans certainly believed that a man who died

<sup>15</sup> OLD gives a second meaning of *pulcher* as “splendid in respect of fame or distinction, illustrious.” The context and Nisus' general thirst for glory seem to me to support this connotation over the more general “fair” or “noble.”

fighting on behalf of his country achieved a particularly noble glory.<sup>16</sup> Nisus, however, does not truly devote himself to his leader and the Trojan community; his "beautiful death" is motivated by a great personal love of his friend. At this point he has totally lost sight of his public mission, since he could have continued on his journey to Aeneas but instead chooses to try to save his friend or to die "gloriously."

If glory from the Roman point of view should be linked with service to the state, its association with material wealth is another problem implicit in the Nisus and Euryalus episode. An important passage is the interview of the two young men with the Trojan leaders. Aletes' role in this scene seems to have been influenced by the *Rhesus*, for while the Greek chorus refers to the scarcity of noble men in times of crisis, the Trojan leader here praises the appearance of such fine young men as Nisus and Euryalus.<sup>17</sup> The elder, concerned with the proper rewards for such service, assures them that they will be suitably repaid by the gods, through their own characters, and tangibly by Aeneas and Ascanius:

"quae vobis, quae digna, viri, pro laudibus istis  
praemia posse rear solvi? pulcherrima primum  
di moresque dabunt vestri: tum cetera reddet  
actutum pius Aeneas atque integer aevi  
Ascanius meriti tanti non immemor umquam." (252-56)

If Aletes is optimistic and even somewhat hyperbolic in this speech, Ascanius' response is far more extreme. He enumerates a list of very valuable objects, some belonging to his father (*pocula, devicta genitor quae cepit Arisba*, 264; *cratera antiquum quem dat Sidonia Dido*, 266) and others not even in the Trojans' possession (e.g., Turnus' horse, captive women). The expected parallel to Nestor's practical offer of sheep to the Greek volunteer does not occur here. While scholars often note that this lavish offer of gifts reflects Ascanius' youthful enthusiasm, the poet may expect the reader to perceive a more somber note beneath the humorous depiction of character. For this extravagant promise perhaps only encourages the materialistic desires that lead Euryalus to the disastrous events later in the episode.

The dangers of such an ethic for Nisus and Euryalus have already been suggested through their actions in Book 5. In the footrace, the older youth suddenly falls and trips his opponent so that his younger friend can come in first and take the prize. While Homer's description of Oilean Aias (23.774-77) provides the model for Nisus' fall into the dung, the *Iliad* passage offers no counterpart for the fallen man fouling

<sup>16</sup> See D. C. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1967) 32. Earl has a very good discussion of Roman views on *gloria* in general and the appropriation of this concept by the aristocracy.

<sup>17</sup> See Fenik (above, note 7) 165.

his competitor. By Vergil's time, the racetrack seems to have provided a standard metaphor for competitive activity in life.<sup>18</sup> The poet here may intend this example of the race symbolically, for it foreshadows their unfortunate behavior in the night-raid, where Euryalus seizes the valuable war gear from the slain Rutulians, Rhamnes' *phalerae*, or decorative breast ornaments, and sword belt with golden studs (359–60) and Messapus' impressive helmet (*galeam Messapi habilem cristisque decoram*, 365). Their acquisitive tendency clearly emerges in Book 5. Euryalus is determined to keep first prize, over objections from the unfairly defeated Salius, by taking advantage of his good looks and winsome tears:

tutatur favor Euryalum lacrimaeque decorae,  
gratior et pulchro veniens in corpore virtus. (343–44)

Nisus too asserts himself and requests a prize when Aeneas has decided to reward Salius more handsomely:

hic Nisus "si tanta," inquit "sunt praemia victis,  
et te lapsorum miseret, quae munera Niso  
digna dabis, primam merui qui laude coronam  
ni me, quae Salium, fortuna inimica tulisset?" (353–56)

Thus in spite of the humor and playfulness of the scene when taken by itself, the reader can perceive in retrospect two significant problems. First, Nisus' intense affection for the handsome Euryalus leads him to identify with his friend's cause in the race and to transfer to Euryalus the personal glory that would have been his own. Second, both young men are very concerned with the material rewards that come with success, at the expense of ethical conduct.

To portray the effects of this quest for personal glory in the account of their attack on the sleeping Rutulians, Vergil borrows significant imaginative material from both the Doloneia and the *Rhesus*. During his rampage, Nisus beheads Remus after killing the man's attendants:

tum caput ipsi aufert domino truncumque relinquit  
sanguine singultantern; atro tepefacta cruore  
terra torique madent. (332–34)

<sup>18</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.42, ed. and transl. W. Miller (London 1951), quotes Chrysippus' use of this analogy:

"When a man enters a footrace," says Chrysippus with his usual aptness, "it is his duty to put forth all his strength and strive with all his might to win; but he ought never with his foot to trip, or with his hand to foul a competitor. Thus in the stadium of life, it is not unfair for anyone to seek what is needful for his own advantage, but he has no right to wrest it from his neighbor."

The Roman writer seems to assume a familiarity with the Greek philosopher's work and weaves the racetrack image easily into his own discussion of proper ethical conduct.

The parallel passage in Homer states the fact that an ugly sound arose as men were stabbed and that the earth grew red with blood:

... τῶν δὲ στόνος ὄρνυτ' αἰκῆς  
ἄορι θεινομένων, ἐρυθθαίνετο δ' αἵματι γαῖα. (10.483–84)

As Fenik notes, the word *singultantem* seems to translate Euripides' use of *μυχθισμός*, by which the charioteer describes the death of Rhesus and the Thracians (789ff.); both are employed in unusual contexts and have connotations of gasping and of pity.<sup>19</sup> But in bringing the horror of the event to the surface, Vergil even surpasses Euripides. Commentators have called attention to the harsh alliterative sounds and especially to the sibilants of the phrase *sanguine singultantem*. If the phrase is in bad taste,<sup>20</sup> the hard, strident sounds do suggest the spurt of gushing blood and the general ugliness of the scene. Furthermore, the loss of a caesura anticipated in the third foot through the elision of *singultantem* and *atro* reinforces the sense of a rapid flow of blood. Vergil's passage thus has a very different effect upon the reader from Homer's and transfers the perverse nature of the event in Euripides from the point of view of a single character (Rhesus' charioteer) to the perspective of the narrator.

To summarize Nisus' rampage, Vergil uses an extended simile which echoes the Doloneia:

impastus ceu plena leo per ovilia turbans  
(suadet enim vesana fames) manditque trahitque  
molle pecus mutumque metu, fremit ore cruento. (339–41)

Homer's simile describes Diomedes swiftly and skillfully dispatching the enemy:

ὥς δὲ λέων μήλοισιν ἀσημάνοισιν ἐπελθὼν  
αἶγεςιν ἢ οἷεσσι κακὰ φρονέων ἐνορούσῃ. (10.485–86)

This traditional epic simile clearly and vividly depicts the warrior's actions. But Vergil makes some significant changes in his model: the notion of madness in the lion's hunger (*vesana fames*), the detail of the animal's bloody mouth, and the state of mind of the victimized flock, helpless in their terror. The poet here distances himself from the agent and empathizes with the victims. Even more significantly, he blurs the clarity of Homer's simile (which refers only to Diomedes) by failing to apply the comparison definitely to either character. Since it concludes the picture of Nisus at his deadly work, one naturally expects the simile

<sup>19</sup> Fenik (above, note 7) 75–80 shows that while *μυχθισμός* refers to a forced passage of air through the nostrils, other related words are used by Homer to convey grief. He suggests that Vergil recognized this second possible connotation and hit upon the word *singulto* to reproduce the two effects of Euripides' word.

<sup>20</sup> T. E. Page, ed., *The Aeneid of Virgil, Books VII–XII* (1900; rpt. London 1967) 272.



to refer to him. Immediately after, however, the phrase *nec minor Euryali caedes* seems to supply the referent. Commentators and translators have been uncertain as to whether the simile applies to Nisus or Euryalus. But this syntactical ambiguity has a real function, for it represents a scene where mad rage is transferred with unfortunate ease from one individual to another.

When we see Euryalus participate in the slaughter, he is even less restrained than his friend. The poet was influenced by Euripides when he describes the death of Rhoetus, for the charioteer in the *Rhesus* similarly awakes from sleep to find his king dead.<sup>21</sup> Here Vergil shows Rhoetus aroused to consciousness of the attack:

Fadumque Herbesumque subit Rhoetumque Abarimque  
ignaros; Rhoetum vigilantem et cuncta videntem,  
sed magnum metuens se post cratera tegebat.  
pectore in adverso totum cui comminus ensem  
condidit adsurgenti et multa morte recepit.  
purpuream vomit ille animam et cum sanguine mixta  
vina refert moriens, hic furto fervidus instat. (344–50)

Grammar and style reinforce sense perfectly in this passage. In the first line, the double pair of proper nouns, each word ending in *-que*, and the elisions which link together the two members of each pair reproduce the blurred impression of a rapid, indiscriminate slaughter. After creating a striking enjambment with the word *ignaros* in the next line, Vergil proceeds immediately to qualify his statement with the words, *Rhoetum vigilantem*. With a bold anacoluthon, the poet retains the accusative case when he repeats Rhoetus' name (presumably to be the object of another verb), but in the next line makes Rhoetus become the implied subject of a finite verb. Some of the description in the rest of the passage is also disturbing. Page explains the difficult phrase *multa morte recepit*: after burying the sword to the hilt in Rhoetus' body, Euryalus withdrew it full of blood.<sup>22</sup> While the unusual phrase *purpuream animam* may have an analogue in the Homeric *πορφύρεος θάνατος*, Vergil brings Homer's abstraction to the level of the concrete, a disgusting combination of red wine and life blood. The whole passage reproduces the aura of a nightmare vision. Here again Vergil goes even beyond Euripides. Whereas the charioteer in the *Rhesus* recalls his confused sleep-state from the clarity of consciousness, the poet here describes the scene as though it were taking place in a dream. He thus conveys more strongly the unnatural horror of Euryalus' actions.

Euryalus not only rages furiously with the sword; he also seizes upon plunder in his quest for personal glory. The poet suggests the two

<sup>21</sup> See Fenik (above, note 7) 72–73.

<sup>22</sup> Page (above, note 20) 272–73.

men's desire for personal glory with the phrase *nimia caede atque cupidine* (354), which joins together the two facets of their obsession, a lust for slaughter and for possessions. Vergil elaborates on the belt which the younger man strips from Rhamnes. He borrows this motif from the Doloneia but alters Homer's account in important ways. In *Iliad* 10, Meriones gives Odysseus a helmet, which had been stolen by the thievish Autolycus, who gave it to Molos as a gift of guest-friendship; from there it went to his son Meriones. Positive in its implications in accordance with the ethics of the *Iliad*, the helmet has thus come full circle from the arch-thief who stole it to his grandson, another thief about to plunder successfully. But in Vergil's text, the belt has a different history. Originally given to Remulus by Caedicus, a man whose name calls to mind the verb *caedo* (to kill), the belt is closely linked with death. For the dying Remulus gave it to his grandson, who never got to keep it since he was stripped of it in war by the Rutulians (*post mortem bello Rutuli pugnaque potiti*, 363).<sup>23</sup> Like the helmet in *Iliad* 10, the belt has symbolic significance, but it is woven into a structure that has sinister overtones implying a proliferation of violence passing from one generation to another. The original recipient of the belt, Remulus, may recall the founders of the Roman state, Romulus and Remus, whose struggle for power ended in the violence that marked the beginning of Rome.

To convey the inglorious death of Euryalus, Vergil imitates the *Iliad* (though not specifically the Doloneia) in a manner which fully conveys the unnatural horror of the events in this episode. He uses a second extended Homeric simile comparing the dying warrior to a fading flower:

purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro  
 languescit moriens, lassove papavera collo  
 demisere caput pluvia cum forte gravantur. (435–37)

The second half is modelled on a passage in the *Iliad* describing the death of a young warrior named Gorgythion:

μήκων δ' ὡς ἐτέρωσε κάρη βάλεν, ἥ τ' ἐνὶ κήπῳ,  
 καρπῷ βριθομένη νοτίησί τε εἰαρινῇσιν. (8.306–7)

By adding the word *forte*, Vergil increases the sense of the casual in this event; he also lessens its magnitude by describing the flower's neck as "weary" (*lasso*).<sup>24</sup> The first half echoes Catullus 11, the poet's bitter farewell to his treacherous mistress Lesbia. There the poet compares himself merely to a common plant at the edge of a meadow and his mistress to a mechanical plow mowing down anything in its path. Catul-

<sup>23</sup> Servius ad loc. states that this is one of the twelve unsolvable passages in the *Aeneid* because of the ambiguous phrase *post mortem*.

<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, B. Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter* (Lund 1945) 29–30, observes that *lassus* is a prosaic word, while *fessus* is poetic.

lus' vision of an exaggerated reversal of traditional male and female roles, of *mores* totally perverted, could hardly contrast more with Homer's depiction of the heroic ethic on the battlefield. As W. R. Johnson observes, Vergil's association of the two elements seems oddly mannered and produces an almost oxymoronic effect; in the tension between the two, Homer's emphasis on the nobility of the warrior's death gives way.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the word *purpureus* recalls the phrase *purpuream animam*, which rather grotesquely described the death of Rhoetus. Euryalus' own demise is no more glorious than his pathetic victim's.

Involved in the problem of Nisus' and Euryalus' quest for glory is the social virtue of *pietas*. They seem to enact pious deeds in relation to the gods, the state, and the family. But their pious activities need to be examined more carefully and to be compared to their Greek models. Whereas the *Rhesus* presents no examples of *eusebeia* towards the gods, Odysseus and Diomedes in the Doloneia invoke Athena specifically at the outset of their night-raid. Both offer prayers which are typical of the heroic society depicted within the poem and of their own individual characters. Odysseus recognizes the help that the goddess constantly gives him in his "hard tasks":

κλῦθί μεν, αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς τέκος, ἧ τέ μοι αἰεὶ  
ἐν πάντεσσι πόνοισι παρίστασαι . . . (10.278–79)

Diomedes recalls Athena's support of his father Tydeus, who accomplished "baneful deeds" on return from a mission to Thebes; for the goddess's continued support in this crisis, he vows a heifer:

. . . ἀτὰρ ἅψ' ἀπὼν μάλα μέρμερα μῆσατο ἔργα  
σὸν σοὶ διὰ θεά, ὅτε οἱ πρόφρασσα παρέστης.  
ὥς νῦν μοι ἐθέλουσα παρίσταο καί με φύλασσε.  
σοὶ δ' αὖ ἐγὼ ῥέξω βούν' ἧνιν εὐρυμέτωπον. (10.289–92)

To make it clear that Athena responds favorably to these two Greeks, the one famed for strategy and the other for prowess, Homer adds a narrative comment: "Ὡς ἔφην εὐχόμενοι, τῶν δ' ἔκλυε Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη (10.295). By emphasizing their characters and the long history of Athena's support for them, Homer shows that Odysseus' and Diomedes' *eusebeia* is a reflection of their nature and patterns of behavior. Significantly, Odysseus invokes Athena a second time with a dedication of the spoils stripped from Dolon's body:

<sup>25</sup> *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's Aeneid* (Berkeley 1976) 61–66 has an excellent discussion of the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus in the context of "dissolving pathos"; Johnson compares this simile to its Homeric and Catullan predecessors and shows in subtle detail the difference between Vergil's mimesis here and Homer's in the descriptions of Gorgythion and Euphorbus in the *Iliad*.

χαῖρε, θεά, τοῖσδεσσι· σε γάρ πρώτην ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ  
 πάντων ἀθανάτων ἐπιδωσόμεθ'· ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὶς  
 πέμψον ἐπὶ Θρηκῶν ἀνδρῶν ἵππους τε καὶ εὐνάς. (462–64)

Here too their piety is supported by their well-reasoned actions, since they have through their cunning elicited vital information about Rhesus and the Thracians from Dolon. Right afterwards, they find the Thracians and sensibly divide the task of overcoming the enemy, as Diomedes kills and Odysseus drags away each corpse so that the horses may pass through unfrightened (10.488–93). Athena's warning for them to leave then seems to be a natural consequence of their own rational behavior.

Similarly, Nisus calls upon Diana for help:

“tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori,  
 astrorum decus et nemorum Latonia custos.  
 si qua tuis umquam pro me pater Hyrtacus aris  
 dona tulit, si qua ipse meis venatibus auxi  
 suspensive tholo aut sacra ad fastigia fixi,  
 hunc sine me turbare globum et rege tela per auras.” (404–9)

Here he echoes Diomedes' prayer to Athena which refers to her protection of his father and Odysseus' second prayer which asks to find the camp of the Thracians. Significantly, however, Nisus invokes the goddess Diana only at the moment of crisis, not at the outset of his mission nor at a point of preliminary success, as the Greeks do. Like Odysseus' and Diomedes' expressions of piety, Nisus' prayer symbolically reflects his character and the nature of his actions in this episode. On one level, Diana, who presides over the woodlands, is the appropriate object of worship for a hunter such as Nisus. Furthermore, as the goddess of chastity, she symbolizes the lack of sexual involvement in Nisus' relation to Euryalus. On the other hand, Diana as Luna (403) is also the moon which shines on Euryalus and reveals his presence to the Rutulians.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Athena with Odysseus and Diomedes, Diana is as inconsistent with Nisus and Euryalus as they themselves have been in their excessive and irrational behavior in this episode.

Earlier Vergil also described Nisus' and Euryalus' relationship as a *pious amor* (5.296). On one level, *pious* here probably connotes “chaste” and thus signals to the reader that Nisus and Euryalus are not physically involved in the manner of Greek homosexual relationships.<sup>27</sup> So, too, it may suggest that Nisus has assumed a kind of paternal responsibility for his younger friend and may thus imply the social meanings inherent in Roman *pietas*. Yet there is an element of the paradoxical in this phrase. It might accurately be termed an oxymoron, since *amor* refers to an

<sup>26</sup> See Lee (above, note 5) 111–12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 110.

emotion that frequently in Latin writings connotes an obsessive passion,<sup>28</sup> whereas *pietas* involves social behavior, the fulfillment of obligations owed to the family, the state, and the gods. The essentially private nature of *amor* is likely to interfere with the publicly oriented demands of *pietas*. W. W. Fowler's definition of *pietas* suggests its incompatibility with private emotions: "the sense of duty to family, State, and gods which rises, in spite of trial and danger, superior to the enticements of individual passion and selfish ease."<sup>29</sup> The emotional nature of this relationship is clearly revealed not only when Nisus chooses to return to find Euryalus and abandons his public mission but also when he violently performs his final actions: he lunges at Volcens and thrusts his sword into the man's face and then, dying himself, falls (*sese proiecit*, 444) upon the body of his friend. Emotion need not always conflict with *pietas*; Vergil shows that Aeneas' feelings for his family at Troy and in Sicily help to reinforce the pious actions required by his public mission decreed by fate.<sup>30</sup> With Nisus and Euryalus, however, the poet shows the unpredictable, irrational side of *amor* that can be destructive rather than creative.

Vergil makes another striking reference to *pietas* in this episode in the context of Euryalus' request that the Trojans comfort his mother. Moved by the young man's avowed concern for his mother, whom he leaves with no farewell, Ascanius immediately thinks of filial piety: *atque animum patriae strinxit pietatis imago* (294). Readers have frequently been moved by the intensity of Ascanius' response to Euryalus here. His strong reaction is one indication, I think, that Vergil in this episode reflects upon the meaning of *pietas* in relation to social activity. To explore this question, we will consider the context more closely. Euryalus claims that he leaves his mother with no farewell because he fears her tears. He reveals his anxiety by immediately justifying himself with an oath: "nox et tua testis dextera, quod nequeam lacrimas perferre parentis" (288–89). While Euryalus suggests only that he would rather avoid a female display of emotion, Nisus earlier pointed to the obligations that the youth owes his mother. In trying to dissuade his friend from joining the expedition, he reminds Euryalus about the possibility of disastrous consequences to his mother, who did not stay behind with the other women in Sicily but continued on with the Trojans out of love for her son. As a point of filial obligation, Nisus clearly implies the need to

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, A. W. Allen, "Elegy and the Classical Attitude toward Love: Propertius 1.1," *YCS* 11 (1950), esp. 259–64; more recently, D. Konstan, "Two Kinds of Love in Catullus," *CJ* 68 (1972), esp. 102–3. P. A. Brunt, "*Amicitia* in the Late Roman Republic," *PCPS* 11 (1965) 1–20, has a good general discussion of the wide range of amicable relations possible in the Roman term *amicitia*.

<sup>29</sup> *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (London 1911) 416.

<sup>30</sup> See R. Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid* (Leiden 1981), esp. 73.

consider the mother's feelings (*neu matri miserae tanti sim causa doloris*, 216) and to remember her sacrifices on behalf of her son ("quae te sola, puer, multis e matribus ausa / persequitur, magni nec moenia curat Acestis," 217–18). By asking Ascanius to comfort his mother, Euryalus shows that he must reject Nisus' sensitive consideration, for he cannot face his responsibility. In this light, Ascanius' immediate thought of *pietas* needs to be qualified. While Euryalus is obviously concerned about his mother, he fails to consider fully his familial obligations, the *pietas* that he owes in very special circumstances.

Vergil culminates a critique of *pietas* in a speech by the youth's own mother. Interestingly, the poet calls her only *mater Euryali* as if to point up her social role in a genre which, because of its martial emphasis, tends to underplay the question of familial responsibility concerning the female.<sup>31</sup> The pathos of this lament has been justly admired by critics from Servius on.<sup>32</sup> While distinctive in style and substance, it contains echoes of Andromache's and Hecuba's laments for Hector in the *Iliad* and Electra's for Orestes in Sophocles' play.<sup>33</sup> But the most important source for this lament structurally is Euripides' *Rhesus*, for at the end of the play the Muse who has lost her young warrior-son appears with his corpse and speaks of her grief to the Trojans. Like Euryalus' mother, she has lost her only child, who she acknowledges was impetuous and over-confident:

ἡ δυσδαίμονα καὶ μελέαν  
ἀπομεμφομένης ἑμοῦ πορευθείς,  
ἀπὸ δ' ἄντομένον πατρός βιαίως. (899–901)

She mentions several points that make her grief intense: the trauma of conception when she was raped by the river god Strymon; her foreknowledge of her son's probable death at Troy; and her feeling of betrayal by Athena, on whose city Athens she has bestowed her musical gifts. Her response is now bitterness: καὶ τῶνδε μισθὸν παῖδ' ἔχουσα ἐν ἀγκάλαις / θρηγνῶ (948–49). While reproaching the Greek goddess, she asserts that Athena will not be able to save Achilles, for whom Apollo already prepares his arrows (978–79). Her speech thus serves as a counterpoint to the prevailing male values, which glorify war and heroism.

<sup>31</sup> See, however, the farewell of Jason and his mother in *Argonautica* 1 (267–305): Alcimedea is an impediment to Jason as hero, and her speech, which rings with pathos, concentrates on the personal disaster for her of his departure. J. Henry, *Aeneidea*, Vol. III (Dublin 1889) 852–53, notes (but does not elaborate) that this speech must have influenced the lament of Euryalus' mother.

<sup>32</sup> Servius ad loc. observes that this passage fulfills all of Cicero's requirements for effectively arousing pity.

<sup>33</sup> G. Highet, *The Speeches in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton 1972) 153–55, thinks that this speech is much less restrained than its models yet not incoherent, almost a consolation in reverse, whereby "the bereaved mother reproaches her dead son."

In her own bitter lament for the death of her only child, Euryalus' mother mentions *pietas* in an unexpected context. Here she hopes that through some gesture of *pietas* she will find death at the hands of the Rutulians:

"figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela  
conicite, o Rutuli, me primam absumite ferro." (493-94)

On one level, this woman may use the "unclassical" meaning of *pietas* as "pity."<sup>34</sup> But, given the prominent references to *pietas* in the Nisus and Euryalus episode, the poet would seem to ask the reader to think about the full significance of the word here. Furthermore, the context of this particular occurrence is significant, for Euryalus' mother criticizes her son's behavior and implies his failure of responsibility. After pointing to Euryalus' mutilated head affixed to a stake, she mentions some specific criticisms. Calling him *crudelis*, she asserts that he was supposed to be the consolation of her old age (*senectae / sera meae requies*, 481-82); that in such dangerous circumstances he should have spoken with her before leaving ("nec te sub tanta pericula missum / adfari extremum miserae data copia matri," 483-84); and that his rash act has now denied her even the important, consoling ritual acts of washing his corpse and closing his eyes (486-89). She simply but effectively observes that she has not even a place to go: *quo sequar?* (490). When she pleads for death at the hands of the Rutulians or by a thunderbolt of Jupiter, her mention of *pietas* places the previous uses in an ironic perspective.

Vergil may imply that the humane element which is also inherent in *pietas* has been neglected or at least only superficially observed.<sup>35</sup> At the root of the problem is that the demands of *pietas* are multiple, applying to conflicting areas of activity. To some extent, Euryalus' disastrous action results from the opposing claims of *pietas* to his mother and to the state. But that polarity needs to be qualified because his civic *pietas* is spurred by a great desire for personal glory and the violation of domestic *pietas* has larger implications. While Euripides shows the de-

<sup>34</sup> See W. R. Johnson, "Aeneas and the Ironies of *Pietas*," *CJ* 60 (1965) 360.

<sup>35</sup> The relation of *pietas* to humane conduct has long been debated in Vergil studies. P. Fecherolle, "La *Pietas* dans l'*Énéide*," *LEC* 2 (1933) 167-81, connects Vergil's use of *pietas* both to justice and to *douceur*, humane behavior. W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (Oxford 1969) 24-25, observes that an important example of Aeneas' *pietas*, burial rites, implies duty joined with human feeling. Johnson (above, note 34) 360-64 interestingly discusses ways by which Vergil creates a "tragic dialectic" by adding the connotation "compassion" to the primary notion of "duty." S. Burgess, "*Pietas* in Virgil and Statius," *PVS* 11 (1971) 48-49, restates the more traditional view of *pietas* as the fulfillment of obligations to family, country, and gods and rejects the additional connotation of "compassion." But, as the context here in *Aeneid* 9 seems to me to imply, duty and humane feeling are sometimes inseparable.

vastating emotional effect of Rhesus' death on his mother, Vergil reveals the deeper consequences of Euryalus' death. Not only is his mother emotionally bereft and socially helpless in a way that the divine Muse cannot be. The morale of the Trojans sinks abysmally both at the gruesome sight of the two young men's impaled heads and at the piercing lament of Euryalus' mother:

hoc fletu concussi animi, maestusque per omnis  
it gemitus, torpent infractae ad proelia vires. (498–99)

Nisus and Euryalus have thus impeded the public cause rather than helped it. Both familial and civic *pietas* have been totally unfulfilled.

In his concern for his friend, Nisus adds another dimension to the conflicting forms of *pietas*. For he has put his friendship with Euryalus on a higher level which exacts the demands of a familial relationship. But, as we have seen, this construction of his relationship leads him first to behavior in Book 5 that cannot be deemed pious and second to total abandonment of the civic *pietas* that was supposed to be his primary goal in the night-raid. In the case of Aeneas, the poet also shows the difficulties of opposing demands of *pietas*. When he joins in a partnership with Dido, he accepts obligations and opens himself up to a justifiable charge of impiety as he decides to leave her for his other responsibilities; yet Aeneas progresses and comes to some kind of resolution of these conflicts when he undergoes his catabasis and meets his father in the underworld.<sup>36</sup> With Nisus and Euryalus, however, the multiple conflicts of piety to country, family, and friend find no solution.

As I have tried to show, the literary background helps to illuminate some of the crucial problems underlying the Nisus and Euryalus episode. The allusions to the Doloneia and to the *Rhesus* point in particular to the characters' concern with *gloria* and *pietas*. While Greek *timê* and *kleos* in general characterize the individualism of the hero, Odysseus and Diomedes are very strong, well-balanced characters who represent the positive side of their society's ethic and share a pragmatic concern for pursuing the Greek cause against the Trojans. By contrast, Euripides' Dolon especially is vainglorious and materialistic but lacks the skill to match his formidable Greek opponents; his quest for glory is absurd and futile. Working against that divergent background, Vergil shows that, while Nisus is concerned about the public crisis, his deeper motivation is desire for glory, which is all too easily transferred to his younger friend. The material desires which Euripides stresses in his character Dolon also motivate Vergil's pair, especially the younger Euryalus; the impression of a Greek ethic out of place in this episode helps to deepen

<sup>36</sup> Monti (above, note 30) 79–82 has an excellent discussion of the process of Aeneas' "syncretization of his emotions with the demands of his social mission."



the tragedy underlying the unfortunate events. Similarly, the question of *pietas* is explored to some extent through allusions to the Doloneia and the *Rhesus*, but again Vergil perceives a more complex situation. Odysseus and Diomedes demonstrate *eusebeia* towards the goddess Athena and, in doing so, reveal the rational side of their own characters that ensures their success. But while Nisus seems to show a similar piety towards Diana, the verbal echoes reveal a fundamentally different disposition towards irrational, excessive behavior. More significantly, Vergil explores *pietas* towards the state and the family in part by incorporating the lament of Euripides' Muse; here, however, the mother's reference to *pietas* suggests that the conflicting demands of piety have failed to be resolved.

By striking adaptations of his models in the Doloneia and the *Rhesus*, Vergil creates a form that mirrors the disconcerting elements of the content. His transformations of several important passages from Homer and Euripides help to produce the surreal quality that characterizes his narrative of the young men's rampage, in which they vent the excesses of their quest for glory. Euripides' language, for example, influences the strange phrase, *sanguine singultantem*, set in the grim context of Nisus' murder of Remus and his attendants. The fantastic dream-vision of the charioteer in the *Rhesus* also adds to the unusual form in this episode, as Vergil describes the death of Rhoetus with unusual syntax and unexpected phrases in a narrative which itself resembles a dream-vision. The poet also drastically adapts elements from the Doloneia to a similar effect. He adjusts Homer's lion-simile not only by including the image of madness but also by deleting a definite referent so as to imply the easy transferral of blood lust from Nisus to Euryalus. The lion-simile too illustrates the complex point of view in this episode, for the poet empathizes with the helpless victims, not with the aggressive attacker. The flower-simile describing Euryalus' death oddly conjoins two contradictory models, famous images from Homer and Catullus, which create a bizarre union of heroic and anti-heroic. It also makes an unexpected internal allusion by recalling the phrase *purpuream animam* in the description of Rhoetus' death. Finally, Vergil also imitates Homer's description of the war gear given to Odysseus. But in the account of the helmet that Euryalus seizes, the image of death is pervasive in a manner totally unlike the Homeric source. Thus, where the poet envisions the revolting consequences of his two protagonists' quest for glory, his transformation of key passages from the Doloneia and the *Rhesus* helps to achieve the unusual form.

But as Vergil's attitude towards Nisus and Euryalus is complex rather than merely critical, so he creates a tension between the Doloneia and the *Rhesus* in this episode. As Fenik has shown, Vergil at points draws upon the *Rhesus* only to delete Euripides' cynicism; Nisus and

Euryalus are certainly not copies of Dolon. But the reader who is aware of the background in Euripides as well as in Homer must adapt his perspective at appropriate points as he draws parallels between the two young Trojans and the major characters from the Doloneia and the *Rhesus*: Odysseus, Diomedes, Dolon, and Rhesus. The highly imitative episodes in the *Aeneid*, such as the story of Dido with its major antecedents in Apollonius, Euripides, and Catullus, require the reader to comprehend the poet-narrator's complex attitude towards his material. The story of Nisus and Euryalus is no exception. If Vergil exposes the deficiencies of his two protagonists, he is also aware of their vitality, their potential as warriors, and their great bond of friendship. While he sees the contradictions latent in *gloria* and *pietas*, values that Romans traced back to their legendary ancestry, the poet also perceives the qualities that transcend such limitations. In this way, he mediates between the idealism of Homer and the cynicism of Euripides. His very strong break in the fiction of the narrative, the apostrophe to the two fallen warriors, perhaps best illustrates this complex point of view:

Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,  
 nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo,  
 dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum  
 accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit. (446–49)

Although they do not achieve their glorious expectations within their own society, the two flawed young men do receive the fame that only the poet can provide (as the Homeric bard could give a lasting *kleos* to the heroes of his song). They forever dominate the action of Book 9 of the *Aeneid*, much as Dido does in Book 4.