

Love's Incompatibility with War:
Understanding the Question of Blame in Vergil's Nisus and Euryalus Episode
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Abstract

My thesis focuses on the issue of blame for Nisus and Euryalus' deaths in Book 9 of Vergil's *Aeneid*. By examining Vergil's models—Homer, Plato, and Catullus—and looking at the Vergilian text in detail, I determine that love's incompatibility with war is the overarching reason for the youths' deaths.

To reach this determination I establish the nature of the youths' relationship as fitting the *erastes-eromenos* model famously praised in Plato's *Symposium*. Furthermore, I draw parallels to Homer, to excuse Nisus and Euryalus' desire for glory and killing from blame, and Catullus, to highlight the costs of war exhibited by the flower simile after Euryalus' death. I argue that Nisus and Euryalus' love-oriented actions in the peaceful setting of Book 5 of the *Aeneid*, along with the failures of the Trojan leaders and the deception of the forest and darkness in Book 9 support this thesis. I finish my analysis with a detailed discussion of Vergil's ambiguous apostrophe which praises the youths after their deaths.

This thesis concludes that despite the near tautological nature of love's incompatibility with war, searching for blame in this episode is important for what it reveals about Vergil and the framework of the *Aeneid*. Much of the scholarship searching for blame has arisen from Vergil's ambiguity about the morality of Nisus and Euryalus' actions. I contend that Vergil is vague to express his ambivalence. Beyond love's incompatibility with war, there are many possible readings of the episode and many possible causes of the youths' deaths, and Vergil does not ask us to choose one over any other. As a result, we can admire Nisus and Euryalus' courage and understand the reasoning behind their actions, while not having to agree with those actions. This understanding is similarly important outside of Book 9, particularly at the end of the *Aeneid* when Aeneas, in a morally ambiguous passage, kills the supplicating Turnus.

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Introduction:

Love is one of the few themes that have pervaded humanity's stories throughout time. From ancient oral tradition to the written word, love has played a driving role in stories. As with many genres, much of classical epic poetry is driven by love. Paris' love for the beautiful Helen in the *Iliad* and Odysseus' attempt to return home to the wife he loves in the *Odyssey* are the most prominent Homeric examples. For Vergil's *Aeneid*, the tragic love between Aeneas and Dido is the example most easily recalled; however, love is present in many unique ways throughout the epic. In the poem we find the love of men for women, fathers for sons, and even comrades for one another. In all of these instances in epics, characters' love is challenged by the presence of war. In its emotionality, this struggle between love and war oftentimes creates resonant scenes for readers. An emblematic example of this emotional resonance can be found in the Nisus and Euryalus episode in Book 9 of Vergil's *Aeneid*. These two Trojan youths decide to traverse through the enemy camp at night through an unknown forest to find Aeneas and bring him back to the Trojans but are discovered and killed before they can complete their mission. For so self-contained an episode in the *Aeneid* there is a hefty amount of scholarship supporting the idea that the tragic tale of Nisus and Euryalus' death in war indeed resounds with readers. In light of the emotions evoked in this episode, it is not surprising that so many scholars have tried to determine the meaning of the deaths of the two youths. Much of this scholarship focuses on two main points of contention: the nature of Nisus and Euryalus' relationship and the underlying cause of their deaths. This paper seeks to find an adequate answer to the second contention: who or what is to blame for Nisus and Euryalus' tragic downfall?

Resolving the contentious matter of the nature of Nisus and Euryalus' relationship will help us understand the cause of their deaths. Among the scholars cited in this paper, John

Makowski, Barbara Pavlock, and Brooks Otis view the youths' relationship as homosexual, while others, including Gordon Duckworth, argue that Nisus and Euryalus are merely close friends in a non-physical relationship. For reasons argued for in Chapter 1 I find it likely that Nisus and Euryalus are meant to be viewed as homosexual lovers and will view them as such for this paper. Equally contentious among scholars, and less clearly answered for me, is the proper assessment of blame for Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. Scholars can again be divided into two groups, in this case based on whether they judge Nisus and Euryalus' actions favorably or not. Chief among the scholars referenced in this paper who hold the youths accountable are Duckworth, Pavlock, and Otis; each assigns blame to the youths' excessive desires, Duckworth to their excessive desire for killing and Pavlock and Otis to their excessive desire for glory. Owen Lee blames the youths' homosexual love itself for their deaths. On the other side are those scholars who view Nisus and Euryalus' actions favorably and cite external factors as causes, such as Mark Petrini, Sergio Casali, and G. J. Fitzgerald; Petrini blames Aletes and Ascanius, while Fitzgerald and Casali blame the Trojan adult community for infusing the youths with false patriotic ideals. Makowski also views Nisus and Euryalus' actions favorably and, while not citing any external factors as causes, claims that their actions are selfless and cannot be blamed for their deaths. With all these suggested factors, I set out to examine the night raid episode in detail in order to determine which people and which factors actually deserve to be blamed and furthermore to find an all-encompassing reason for Nisus and Euryalus' tragic deaths.

This paper will begin by looking at Vergil's philosophical and literary models. I will argue in the first chapter that Nisus and Euryalus are indeed portrayed as homosexual lovers and fit into the *eromenos-erastes* model famously praised in Plato's *Symposium*. Furthermore, I will contend that by making the youths' love so similar to the exemplar of ideal love set up in Plato,

Vergil expresses the idea that their mutual love is pure and irreproachable. With the nature of the youth's relationship established, I will then address Duckworth, Pavlock, and Otis' concerns that Nisus and Euryalus' excessive desire for glory and killing leads directly to their deaths. Using Book 10 of Homer's *Iliad* as a primary model for Vergil, I will argue that Nisus and Euryalus' actions are consistent with the heroic model set by Odysseus and Diomedes and that their desire for slaughter and plunder cannot therefore be the primary cause of their deaths. Furthermore, I will argue that this seemingly selfish desire for glory and slaughter is actually motivated by the youths' selfless love for each other. Based on these findings, I will contend that neither the youths' relationship nor their actions can be directly blamed for their deaths; rather, it is their pure love's incompatibility with war that should be blamed.

To further explore this idea that love's incompatibility with war could be the overarching reason for Nisus and Euryalus' death I am searching for, in the second chapter I analyze the Vergilian text itself, beginning with the first appearance of the youths. Nisus and Euryalus' actions in the peaceful setting of Book 5 of the *Aeneid* parallel their actions in Book 9. The fact that their love-oriented actions in Book 5 result in no meaningful consequences while their love-oriented actions in Book 9 result in their deaths supports the contention that the wartime setting itself is to blame for their deaths. I will then discuss the intermingling of the Homeric with the erotic in the night raid episode of Book 9 and argue that this intermingling is Vergil's way of highlighting Nisus and Euryalus' love for each other as the flaw in their attempt to be true Homeric heroes. Furthermore, I will explore the similarities and differences between Nisus and Euryalus and the close Homeric pair, Achilles and Patroclus, using this comparison to clarify the problem of blame.

In the third chapter I will investigate why Nisus and Euryalus are unable to adopt a proper mindset for the wartime setting and why this failure leads to their deaths. The failures of the Trojan leaders, Ascanius and Aletes, are relevant here, and I will address Petrini's argument blaming Ascanius and Aletes, as well as Casali and Fitzgerald's arguments blaming the entire Trojan adult community for Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. Furthermore, I will address the extensive list of gifts promised Nisus and Euryalus that foreshadows the youths' deaths, paying close attention to the significance of the mention of Dido in this list. Again comparisons to the *Doloneia* will be drawn to highlight the Trojan leaders' differences with their Homeric counterparts in terms of gifts promised and help given and to further prove the deception of Ascanius and Aletes. In the fourth chapter I will also explore the other factors that seem to exacerbate Nisus and Euryalus' inability to adjust to war, most prominently the deception of the forest and the darkness, as well as the youths' inattention to the gods. Moreover, Nisus' self-sacrifice and the flower simile at Euryalus' death will receive significant attention in the fifth chapter for the tragic costs of war they illuminate. In the sixth chapter I will finish my analysis with a discussion of Vergil's apostrophe praising the youths and its possible meanings. Taking into account Vergil's models and all of the evidence I have gathered from the *Aeneid* itself, I will conclude the paper by discussing whether the overarching concept of love's incompatibility with war is an adequate source of blame for Nisus and Euryalus' deaths and, if not, where future scholarship should look and whether searching for blame is even the correct approach to understanding the significance of this episode in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Chapter 1: Possible Agents of Blame in Light of Philosophical and Literary Models

While scholars attribute Nisus and Euryalus' deaths to varying causes, it is essential to view the night raid in Book 9 of the *Aeneid* in the context of the philosophical and literary

models that influence Vergil in order to understand why they died. In crafting the characters of Nisus and Euryalus, Vergil borrows heavily from the Platonic school of thought. Through careful wording Vergil depicts Nisus and Euryalus as *erastes* and *eromenos* respectively, modeling their relationship on the notion of ideal love espoused in Plato's *Symposium*.¹ In addition to establishing the two youths as lovers, Vergil models their mission on the *Doloneia* in Book 10 of Homer's *Iliad*. Just as Odysseus and Diomedes slaughter and plunder their way through sleeping enemies at night, Nisus and Euryalus oftentimes seem more concerned with killing and glory than their actual mission. Understanding the episode in Book 9 in the context of Book 10 of the *Iliad* and Plato's *Symposium* allows us to assess proper responsibility for their deaths. If we accept the Homeric and Platonic influences upon Vergil's depiction of Nisus and Euryalus' motivations, it appears that neither their homosexual love nor their desire for glory and plundering during their night raid can be blamed for their deaths. Instead, I believe these models suggest that war's incompatibility with Nisus and Euryalus' love is the primary cause for their failure. As these passages will show, the requirements for behavior in war differ from the requirements for behavior as a lover in peaceful times. Because Nisus and Euryalus are unable to transition from the requirements of love to the requirements of war, their behavior is unsuitable to survive in war, and, consequently, their mission fails and they die.

While scholars disagree on the exact nature of Nisus and Euryalus' relationship, there are many reasons to believe that Vergil intended the two youths to be seen as lovers. In fact, despite early scholarship to the contrary, most modern scholars view the relationship of Nisus and

¹ See Finkelberg (1997): 232. *Erastes* and *eromenos* are the Greek homosexual terms which Plato adopts in his *Symposium*. *Erastes* refers to the older, active man in the relationship while *eromenos* refers to the younger, passive man.

Euryalus as sexual.² While Vergil never explicitly portrays the two as anything more than close friends, he does allude to a physical relationship. It is likely that Vergil could not explicitly reveal the two as homosexual since Roman society deemed homosexual relations between two male Roman citizens as morally wrong. While homosexuality was practiced in Augustan Rome, it was only deemed morally acceptable when it involved a Roman and either a slave or a non-Roman.³ Nevertheless, Vergil shows a certain comfort with and acceptance of homosexuality in his other poems; in his *Eclogues* in particular, homosexuality is widespread and even praised in parts.⁴ However, in the *Aeneid* Vergil had to be considerably more discreet as the poem was written for the emperor Augustus, whose rule had been marked by hard moral and legal stances against homosexuality.⁵ Yet despite the pressure to conform to Augustus' moral standards in his epic, I believe Vergil takes great care to subtly depict Nisus and Euryalus' relationship as following the pattern of ideal homosexual love (i.e. the *erastes-eromenos* relationship) which originated in Greece and eventually came to Rome, without ever explicitly stating that Nisus and Euryalus were involved physically.

By fitting Nisus and Euryalus into the *erastes* and *eromenos* roles famously praised in Plato's *Symposium*, Vergil reveals the two youths' common love as the primary motivation for

² See Makowski (1989): 2. Makowski, Pavlock, G. Williams, L. P. Wilkinson, W. F. Jackson Knight, P. Grimal, B. Otis, S. Lilja, D. Gillis and F. Klingner among others view the relationship as physical. The most prominent scholars who view Nisus and Euryalus as merely friends are L. J. D. Richardson, A. Cartault, P. Colmant, G. Duckworth, and A. Thorton. Makowski argues that scholars writing in an earlier era can be forgiven for viewing the youths as only friends because of the unacceptability of homosexuality in society at the time.

³ See Williams, C. (1995): 517-18.

⁴ See Williams, G. (1962): 42. According to Williams the homosexuality is most prominent in *Eclogues* 2 and 3.

⁵ See Williams, G. (1962) 28-29. In 18 B.C.E. and 9 C.E. Augustus passed legislation enforcing marriage and invoking penalties on behaviors he deemed detrimental to marriage. The *lex Scantinia*, in particular, invoked penalties for homosexual behavior.

most of their actions.⁶ According to Pausanias in the *Symposium*, there are many types of love but only one ideal love; his notion of an ideal relationship involves two males with great physical beauty, with one older and wiser and the other younger, beardless, and in need of mentoring.⁷ These characteristics are necessary for the relationship to be of mutual benefit. To ensure that both are in the relationship for virtuous reasons, Pausanias believes that “the [*erastes*] must be able to develop the [*eromenos*] understanding and virtue in general, and the [*eromenos*] must want to acquire education and wisdom in general” (Christopher Gill transl. 184d). It is only when all these conditions are met that ideal love is achieved and a physical relationship is acceptable. Vergil takes great measures to emphasize that Nisus and Euryalus reflect this idealized love. When Vergil introduces Euryalus in Book 9, he notes that “there was not any Trojan more beautiful than him, nor one having borne Trojan arms, a boy showing the first signs of youth on his unshaven face” *quo pulchrior alter / non fuit Aeneadum Troiana neque induit arma, / ora puer prima signans intonsa iuventa* (9.179-181). Furthermore, Vergil describes Nisus and Euryalus as sharing “one love” *amor unus* (9.182). While some scholars such as Servius and J. Henry argue that *amor unus* refers to a common love for war, I tend to agree with Philip Hardie who believes it refers to their common love for each other.⁸ Vergil also addresses Pausanias’ worries of an *erastes* taking advantage of his *eromenos*,⁹ revealing Nisus’ love for Euryalus as pure by introducing him in Book 5 as a companion to Euryalus “out of pious love for

⁶ See Makowski (1989): 3-4. Makowski argues that the description of Nisus and Euryalus, with its similarities to the platonic dialogue of the *Symposium* and also to Phaedrus’ speech, fits them into these roles. He argues that the *erastes-eromenos* relationship is accepted as the norm by every speaker in the *Symposium* and that Nisus and Euryalus are “depicted in such a way as to serve as a personal Vergilian *exemplum* of the ideal *erastes-eromenos* relationship.”

⁷ See 181d.

⁸ See Hardie (1994): 108. However, as Hardie points out, the notion of *amor* in the *Aeneid* can be problematic.

⁹ See 183b: “imagine that someone who wanted to get money from a person or political office or some other position of influence, was prepared to behave as lovers do towards the boys they love.”

the boy” *amore pio pueri* (5.296). Nisus also serves as a mentor¹⁰ to the younger Euryalus and has a clear sense of responsibility for the boy.¹¹ When the idea of the mission is first brought up, Nisus refuses to allow Euryalus to accompany him, fearing for the boy’s safety.¹² While on the mission, it is Nisus who takes charge and instructs Euryalus, who responds by imitating Nisus in every way, especially in war-related actions such as looting and slaughtering. While his mimicking behavior reveals his devotion to Nisus, this devotion is also clearly shown in how he reacts to Nisus’ initial proposal of leaving him behind. He fears being apart from Nisus more than the possibility of death.¹³ He desires nothing more than to stay with Nisus and impress him, “struck by his love for [Nisus’] praise” *laudum percussus amore* (9.197).¹⁴

If we accept that Plato’s portrait of ideal love lies behind Vergil’s portrait of Nisus and Euryalus as *erastes* and *eromenos*, then I believe we can further accept the fact that Vergil is implying his approval of their relationship. This approval suggests that the youths’ deaths are caused by something different than the nature of their relationship, and, in fact, may happen in spite of the good that their relationship represents. Owen Lee disagrees with this contention and claims that the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus in actuality prove that Vergil views homosexual

¹⁰ See Makowski (1989): 6. Makowski claims that Nisus “corresponds exactly to Phaedrus’ description of an *erastes* and is complementary in every respect to his younger counterpart...he serves not merely as comrade-in-arms, but also as mentor and role model.”

¹¹ Nisus specifically worries about Euryalus’ mother in 9.216-218: “nor would I be a cause of so much sadness to your wretched mother, who alone, boy, out of many mothers dared to follow you, nor cared about the walls of great Acestes” *neu matri miserae tanti sim causa doloris, / quae te sola, puer, multis e matribus ausa, persequitur, magni nec moenia curat Acestae.*

¹² See Vergil 9.210-218. Also see Chapter 2 for more on Nisus’ initial refusal to bring Euryalus with him.

¹³ See Vergil 9.205-206: *est hic, est animus lucis contemptor et istum / qui uita bene credat emi, quo tendis, honorem.*

¹⁴ See Hardie (1994): 111. This line is somewhat ambiguous and Euryalus can be viewed as referring to praise in battle.

love as “introverted, obsessive, and self-destructive.”¹⁵ However, as Vergil directly implies his approval for the two youths—and Nisus’ self-sacrifice, in particular—through a lengthy apostrophe at the end of the episode, I believe we can accept their relationship as positive.¹⁶ While Nisus’ hopeless attempt to rescue the captured Euryalus or die in the attempt at first glance seems to be a pointless waste of life and harmful to the Trojan cause, it is the proper decision to make for one in an ideal homosexual relationship. According to Plato’s *Symposium*, the gods particularly honor one who sacrifices himself for his lover even after the lover is dead. Phaedrus uses the story of Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad* as an example, assigning Achilles the role of *eromenos* and Patroclus the role of *erastes*.¹⁷ At the start of the poem, with his heart no longer in war and knowing that he is destined to die young in battle if he stays and kills the Trojan hero Hector, Achilles resolves to return home and live a long, nondescript life farming. Yet when his *erastes*, Patroclus, is killed by Hector, Achilles reenters the battle and kills Hector in revenge, despite knowing it will be his downfall.¹⁸ Phaedrus says, “He not only died for him but also died as well as him, since Patroclus was already dead. This won special admiration and exceptional honors from the gods, because it showed how much he valued his lover” (179e). Sacrificing one’s self for one’s *erastes* or *eromenos* seems to be not only acceptable, but highly honored as well, regardless of the circumstances. According to the Greek notion of ideal love, devotion to one’s lover seems to take precedent even over devotion to one’s people, which helps

¹⁵ See Lee (1979): 111-112.

¹⁶ See Vergil 9.446-449. This apostrophe will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

¹⁷ See Clarke (1978): 381-396 for different scholars’ opinions of the nature of Achilles and Patroclus’ relationship. For this paper we will accept Achilles and Patroclus as presented in the *Symposium* 179e-180b: Achilles as *eromenos*, Patroclus as *erastes*.

¹⁸ See Richmond Lattimore transl. *Il.* 22.331-33 as Achilles kills Hector for revenge saying, “Hektor, surely you thought as you killed Patroklos you would be / safe, and since I was far away you thought nothing of me, / o fool, for an avenger was left, far greater than he.” Also see 18.88-92 where Achilles tells his mother that he is going to kill Hector, despite the certain death it means for him.

explain the ambiguity of calling Nisus and Euryalus “fortunate pair” *fortunati ambo* in the apostrophe (9.446). This apostrophe seems to celebrate the fact that Nisus dies on top of Euryalus, his *eromenos*.¹⁹ In contrast, Achilles and Patroclus die at different times and far apart from each other.²⁰ With Vergil’s approval, it is unlikely that Nisus and Euryalus’ relationship can be directly to blame for their deaths.

Many scholars, regardless of whether they view the relationship as homosexual, are critical of the plundering and slaughter of Nisus and Euryalus and their obsession with glory during the night raid in Book 9.²¹ These scholars argue that their slaughter is needless because it takes up the precious time of darkness they need to remain undetected, leading to Euryalus’ capture. While Nisus and Euryalus indeed seek glory, many scholars in passing judgment lose sight of the youths’ mutual love. As argued above, setting Nisus and Euryalus up as *erastes* and *eromenos* makes the two youths’ love for each other the primary motivation for their actions.²² Nevertheless, Pavlock is critical of Nisus, in particular, for seeking glory of an individualistic nature rather than the true glory in pursuing a public cause and argues that Nisus’ attempt at glory comes from selfish, personal reasons.²³ She specifically cites Nisus’ decision after Euryalus is captured to “rush into a beautiful death from wounds” *pulchram properet per vulnera*

¹⁹ The apostrophe immediately follows 9.444-445: *tum super exanimus sese proiecit amicum / confossus, placidaque ibi demum morte quievit* “then, having been pierced from above, he threw himself on his dead friend, and there, in the calm of death, he finally rested.” See chapter 6 for more on why Vergil refers to Nisus and Euryalus as *fortunati*.

²⁰ Patroclus dies alone in battle in 16.818-829 while Achilles is in his tent. Achilles’ death occurs after the *Iliad*, but, according to tradition, he dies later in the Trojan War at the hands of Paris.

²¹ G. Duckworth, K. Quinn, B. Otis, W.A. Camps, A.J. Boyle, M. DiCesare, G. Fitzgerald, and L.A. MacKay are the most prominent scholars who argue that the youths’ concern with plundering and killing causes their downfall. E. Adelaide Hahn goes so far as to state that it was highly desirable from the Roman point of view for Nisus and Euryalus to fail in their mission and die in the process because of their slaughtering and plundering.

²² Thorton, Lennox, Kraggerud, and G. Williams, whether they view Nisus and Euryalus as lovers or friends, are prominent among those scholars who defend Nisus and Euryalus’ actions.

²³ See Pavlock (1985): 210.

mortem (9.401) rather than carry out the mission.²⁴ While it is true that Nisus and Euryalus are not as concerned with the “true glory” that comes from serving the public, I disagree with Pavlock’s assertion that they act selfishly. In fact, as Makowski argues, their actions are entirely selfless as they come directly out of love for each other.²⁵ In addition, Makowski argues that “the *eros* of one man for another is inseparable from the striving for fame and glory,”²⁶ which helps explain why scholars can mistake Nisus and Euryalus’ motivations as glory-oriented. Although the argument can be made that both should have been more concerned with carrying out their mission, neither is seeking glory for himself. Nisus plunders and slaughters because he wants to set a good heroic example for his *eromenos*; Euryalus does the same because he wants to impress Nisus.²⁷ And while Nisus indeed rejects the public cause to attempt a futile rescue mission, he does so because he feels guilty that he got Euryalus involved in danger, not to achieve glory for himself. As the *Symposium* argues, sacrifice is the only choice left to an *erastes* when his *eromenos* is in danger: “as far as abandoning his [*eromenos*] or failing to help him in danger—no one is such a coward that he could not be inspired into courage by love” (179a).²⁸ Nisus follows this model exactly and he shows his feelings of guilt by calling attention to his own actions: *me, me adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum / o Rutuli, mea fraus omnis, nihil iste nec ausus / nec potuit...tantum infelicem nimium dilexit amicum* “I am present, I am the one who has done it, turn your swords on me, o Rutulians. The whole deceit is mine, that one

²⁴ See Pavlock (1985): 210.

²⁵ See Makowski (1989): 3: “every action which Nisus and Euryalus perform has their mutual *amor* as its *point d’appui*.”

²⁶ See Makowski (1989): 8.

²⁷ See Hardie (1994): 111. Hardie goes so far as to call Euryalus a “copycat” when it comes to heroics.

²⁸ See Pollmann (2001): 23-27: Pollmann argues that Statius in his *Thebaid* disagrees with this point. He believes that Statius, in showing the effective self-sacrifice of his character Dymas, is exposing Nisus’ “suicide” in contrast as both rash and uncourageous regardless of his feelings for Euryalus. He sees the youths’ deaths as representative of a failure in their military and ethical behavior.

intended nothing, he was not able...he just loved his unlucky friend too much” (427-30). Nisus seems content to rush into death because he feels he has failed his *eromenos*, and, as a faithful *erastes*, dying while defending his *eromenos* is his only viable option.²⁹ Forced to choose between two irreconcilable duties, Nisus unhesitatingly chooses his duty towards his *eromenos* over his duty to his country which is an acceptable decision to make according to the *Symposium*.³⁰ If their actions during the night raid are based in love and are acceptable in an *erastes-eromenos* relationship, their actions cannot be the direct cause of their deaths; there must be a deeper reason outside of their sexuality and actions.

The actions of Nisus and Euryalus, in addition to being accepted *erastes-eromenos* behavior, are also accepted heroic behavior according to the precedent set in the mission of Odysseus and Diomedes in Book 10 of the *Iliad*, further excusing them from culpability. Vergil clearly modeled the slaughtering and plundering of Nisus and Euryalus on the actions of Diomedes and Odysseus, even using a simile of a lion stalking sheep to describe Nisus that is very similar to Homer’s simile describing Diomedes.³¹ Similar to Nisus and Euryalus, Odysseus and Diomedes, having been sent to spy on the Trojans, spend most of their time slaughtering and plundering. In fact, Diomedes, in an act more heinous than anything Nisus or Euryalus does, kills the captured spy Dolon, despite Dolon’s attempt to grab his chin and beg for mercy.³² Diomedes and Odysseus then take the information they have gathered and wreak havoc, despite

²⁹ See Makowski (1989): 13. According to L. Alfonsi, Nisus’ notion of a beautiful death here is Platonic and based on a related idea in the *Phaedo* (114D).

³⁰ Nisus’ actions here are also compatible with Aeneas’ decision to neglect his duty towards Rome and rush back into burning Troy to find Creusa: 2.735-795.

³¹ *Impastus ceu plena leo per ovilia turbans / (suadet enim vesana fames) manditque trahitque / molle pecus mutumque metu, fremit ore cruento* “like a hungry lion agitating through a full sheepfold (for mad hunger persuades him) and he chews and drags sheep silent and weak with fear, he roars with a bloody mouth” (9.339-41) compared to “as a lion advancing on the helpless herds unshepherded of sheep or goats pounces on them with wicked intention” (*Il.*10.485-6).

³² See *Il.*10.454-457.

not finding out anything pertinent to their mission.³³ R. M. Henry observes that after hearing this news “they make no attempt to find out what they were sent to find out...[W]e can assume then that Diomedes and Odysseus are henceforward only intent on plunder, and plunder for themselves.”³⁴ Upon their return to camp, the Greek heroes are praised for their bravery. Nestor, considered the wisest of the Greeks, seems unconcerned that Diomedes and Odysseus did not succeed in their mission; he speaks only of the horses Odysseus stole, declaring “I think it must be some god who met you, and gave them to you since both of you are beloved to Zeus” (*Il.*10.551-2). Odysseus responds with braggadocio, concerned only with the spoils he and Diomedes have won and the thirteen men they have killed. Odysseus and Diomedes’ actions and Nestor’s response demonstrate that slaughtering and plundering, even at the expense of the mission, is acceptable behavior for heroes. Mark Petrini supports this view and, in defending Nisus and Euryalus, references many heroic figures to argue that “slaughtering enemies and gathering spoils are, after all, the business of heroes.”³⁵ Petrini even specifically praises Euryalus for his actions, impressed that despite being so young “Euryalus passes all tests, doing everything one might expect of a hero.”³⁶ It is also important to note that neither Nisus nor Euryalus fully succumbs to *furor* in his slaughtering.³⁷ While both experience rage,³⁸ this behavior is normal in battle and understandable considering the youths’ age and inexperience.

³³ See *Il.*10.485-539 for their slaughter. The information from Dolon is not pertinent because Diomedes and Odysseus were instructed by Nestor to find out whether the Trojans “purpose to stay where they are, close to their ships, or else to withdraw back into their city, now that they have beaten the Achaians” (10.208-10). Diomedes and Odysseus ask Dolon this query but all they are told is where the Trojan allies are sleeping. Content with this information, they kill Dolon and proceed to slaughter the sleeping allies.

³⁴ See Henry (1905): 195.

³⁵ See Petrini (1997): 27.

³⁶ See Petrini (1997): 26.

³⁷ It is important to note the distinction between Nisus and Euryalus, who overcome their *furor*, and Aeneas, whose tragic character flaw throughout the epic is his *furor*.

³⁸ See 9.343: *incensus et ipse / perfurit* “incensed, he himself also raged.”

That both demonstrate the ability to voluntarily come out of their rage and cease killing when necessary is commendable: *sensit enim nimia caede atque cupidine ferri / absistamus ait nam lux inimica propinquat* “When he sensed that [Euryalus] was carried off by excessive death and desire, [Nisus] said ‘let us desist, for the unfriendly light draws near’” (9.354-55). Both immediately stop killing, and, after briefly gathering plunder, continue on with their journey. Indeed, the youths’ slaughtering and plundering does contribute to their capture; but the fact that their behavior is acceptable behavior for heroes and is supported by the precedent of Odysseus and Diomedes further excuses Nisus and Euryalus from direct culpability in their tragic downfall.

It is clear from these parallels that Vergil desires us to be mindful of Homer and Plato when reading the Nisus and Euryalus episode. Because of this consideration, it follows that Vergil does not want us to blame homosexuality or Nisus and Euryalus’ preoccupation with slaughter and glory for their deaths. I believe, in view of these literary and philosophical models, that Vergil intends us to view love’s incompatibility with war as the primary cause of the failure of the mission and the youths’ deaths. War requires duty to country before lovers and friends and, in order for one to survive, concern for one’s self before all else. This concern for one’s self is necessary for survival because too much concern for others can lead to emotional involvement that impairs judgment and puts one’s own self in unnecessary danger. Platonic love, in contrast, requires placing an *erastes* or *eromenos* before all else and having concern for him ahead of oneself. Nisus and Euryalus’ inability to transition from the requirements of love to the requirements of war condemns them; with each concerned for his lover before himself, neither has the capacity to survive the dangers of war. Looking at this episode in greater detail will

further illustrate Nisus and Euryalus' failure to adjust to war's requirements and show why this failure leads directly to their deaths.

Chapter 2: Foreshadowing of Nisus and Euryalus' Inability to Adapt to War

Book 5 of the *Aeneid* introduces the idea that love's incompatibility with war is the main cause of Nisus and Euryalus' deaths, a conclusion fully realized in Book 9. Nisus and Euryalus first appear in Book 5 which, despite being set in peaceful times, foreshadows the events of the night raid in Book 9. Using a foot race, Vergil shows Nisus and Euryalus as being motivated by their strong love for each other and the desire for glory that drives them in Book 9. However, the key distinction between the two passages is that in the peaceful setting of Book 5 everything turns out well for Nisus and Euryalus, further demonstrating that war's incompatibility with Nisus and Euryalus' love must be the primary cause of their deaths. In addition, by basing the foot race episode on a Homeric passage and intermingling Homeric themes with erotic themes both in Book 5 and in Book 9, Vergil foreshadows Nisus and Euryalus' love as the reason for their failure as Homeric-style heroes.

Vergil introduces Nisus and Euryalus in Book 5, as in Book 9, with love diction, foreshadowing the role love will play in the youths' actions in Book 9. He describes Euryalus as "marked by his youthful appearance" and Nisus as having "pious love for the boy" *Euryalus forma insignis viridique iuventa, / Nisus amore pio pueri* (5.295-6). This emphasis on Euryalus' beauty and use of the charged word, *amore*, to describe Nisus' feelings for Euryalus is very similar to the strong adjectives used when Vergil introduces them again in Book 9.³⁹ As Makowski points out, and as I have argued earlier, the frequency of this love diction, especially in the opening lines of Books 5 and 9, clearly sets up Nisus and Euryalus as *erastes* and

³⁹ See Chapter 1 for Vergil's description of Nisus and Euryalus at the beginning of Book 9.

eromenos.⁴⁰ As this love diction continues throughout Book 5, the shared love between Nisus and Euryalus emerges as their defining characteristic. For example, when Nisus slips in a bull's blood and falls while leading the race, he is "not forgetful of Euryalus and their love" *non tamen Euryali, non ille oblitus amorum* (5.334). Hence Nisus trips Salius, the runner in second place, to allow Euryalus to win. It is important to note that this episode has its roots in Homer. Just as Nisus slips in a bull's blood, Ajax—having been tripped by Athena—slips in an ox's feces, allowing Odysseus to win the sprint during Patroclus' funeral games.⁴¹ While Patroclus' death and Achilles' role in it may not be overtly recalled here, it is possible that Vergil intends a subtle foreshadowing of Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. Vergil has also expanded the Homeric episode of the foot race by adding the erotic nature of Nisus and Euryalus' relationship. The juxtaposition of the Homeric with the erotic is an important way Vergil foreshadows the youths' heroic shortcoming—the fact that they are governed by their love for each other. The important role of *amor* here in Book 5 foreshadows the prominent role *amor* will play for Nisus again in Book 9,⁴² especially at the penultimate moment in which he decides to sacrifice himself in a hopeless attempt to save Euryalus rather than continue on with his mission.⁴³

In addition to introducing Nisus and Euryalus' love for each other and the role it plays in their actions, Book 5 also introduces, in a peaceful setting, the pair's fixation with achieving glory and plunder. When Salius complains to Aeneas that he was wrongfully tripped, Euryalus

⁴⁰ See Makowski (1989): 5. Also see note 1 for a list of scholars who agree and disagree with the notion that Nisus and Euryalus are lovers.

⁴¹ See *Il.23.773-776*.

⁴² See 9.390-401: Having realized that Euryalus has been caught, Nisus is mindful only of the quandary of his *eromenos*, and thinks no more of his mission or duty to his people.

⁴³ Makowski and Pavlock agree that Nisus' actions in Book 5 foreshadow his later decision to attempt to save Euryalus. However, Pavlock is critical of Nisus for putting his *amor* for his *eromenos* before first, his ethics in Book 5, and second, his *pietas* towards his country in Book 9. Nevertheless, as I argue earlier, there is precedent for putting *amor* for an *eromenos* before all else.

is determined to keep the first prize and wins the people over through his boyish beauty and his crying.⁴⁴ After Aeneas assuages Salius' anger with a gift of a lion hide, Nisus complains in an effort to receive a prize himself: *quae munera Niso / digna dabis* "what worthy prizes will you give to Nisus?" (5.354-5). This strong desire for gifts foreshadows Nisus and Euryalus' plundering. A significant parallel can be observed between the three gifts awarded to the first three finishers in the race and the three items Euryalus steals in Book 9.⁴⁵ First prize in the race is "a horse distinguished with ornaments" *equum phaleris insignem* (5.310), second prize is "a sword belt with gold" *auro balteus* (5.312-13), and third prize is "an Argolican helmet" *Argolica...galea* (5.314), all three of which parallel the *phalera* and *aurea bulla* and *galea* plundered in Book 9.⁴⁶ Yet while, the prizes awarded to the winners of the foot race are used to assuage the hurt feelings arising from Nisus' tripping of Salius, the plunder Euryalus takes in Book 9 will gleam in the moonlight and give him away to the enemy. In the peaceful setting of the foot race Nisus and Euryalus are able to avoid any serious fallout from their love-driven actions because Aeneas is able to pacify Salius with a gift. But in the wartime setting of Book 9, when their love-driven plundering gives them away to the Rutulians there is no one there to save them and pacify the wronged party. Unfortunately, this time the penalty is far more severe than the anger of a wronged comrade, and Nisus and Euryalus are killed. The contrast in end result between these two parallel episodes emphasizes how incompatible love-driven actions are in a wartime setting.

⁴⁴ See 5.343-4: *tutatur favor Euryalum lacrimaeque decorae / gratior et pulchro veniens in corpore virtus* "his favor and beautiful tears protected Euryalus, and the rather pleasing virtue coming into his beautiful body."

⁴⁵ See Hardie (1997): 138-9.

⁴⁶ See Vergil 9.359-60, 365 where Euryalus plunders the "ornaments of Rhamnetus and his gold-studded sword belt...then the helmet of Messapus decorated with plumes" *phaleras Rhamnetis et aurea bullis / cingula...tum galeam Messapi habilem cristisque decoram* [emphasis mine].

The opening section of the episode in Book 9 reinforces the notion that war interrupts the peaceful state of love in which Nisus and Euryalus have heretofore existed and foreshadows their failure to properly adjust to the wartime circumstances. Nisus is introduced with the patronymic Hyrtacides setting him up as a typical Homeric hero: *Nisus erat portae custos, acerrimus armis, / Hyrtacides, comitem Aeneae quem miserat Ida / uenatrix* “Nisus was the guardian of the gate, very keen with weapons, a son of Hyrtacides whom Ida the huntress had sent as a companion for Aeneas” (9.176-178).⁴⁷ However, the episode also begins by juxtaposing Nisus and Euryalus’ love and eroticism next to their Homeric introduction (9.176-183) further foreshadowing *amor*’s role in their failure as proper Homeric heroes. Despite this emphasis on their love, with the imminent fighting between the Trojans and native Italians, the chance to achieve glory and fame in a wartime setting proves irresistible to Nisus and Euryalus and provides hope that they, despite their youth and inexperience, can slip through the sleeping enemy at night and find Aeneas. However, unlike in Book 5 where the consequences of their love-driven actions are avoided, the consequences of their actions in this wartime setting are far more severe than a lack of a prize for a race. As Book 9 progresses not only will war disrupt the peaceful quiet of Nisus and Euryalus’ love, but, with the youths’ inability to adapt their behavior to their new circumstances, it will prematurely age them and lead to their deaths.

After the brief introduction of the two youths, Nisus immediately raises one of the most essential questions of the episode (and it could be argued, one of the most important questions of the whole *Aeneid*), a question that helps explain how war has influenced his desire to slip through the enemy to find Aeneas. In his first words in Book 9, Nisus asks Euryalus: *dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, / Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?* “Do the gods introduce

⁴⁷ The patronymic, Hyrtacides, is also used to describe Nisus later in the episode at 9. 234 and 9.319.

this passion into people's minds, Euryalus, or does the raging desire of each person become his god?" (9.184-185). This question presents two different ways of looking at the relationship between the human and the divine: essentially it is the dilemma between whether the gods in fact cause inner desires and actions or if they just symbolize a person's own desires—a dilemma about the extent of free will.⁴⁸ Nisus and Euryalus' actions in this book will answer this question. No god assists them in their raid or is present with them as they make mistakes that lead directly to their deaths;⁴⁹ the action takes place entirely on a human level. Vergil seems to imply that the success or failure of these two mortals is the result of their decisions and their actions, not that of the gods;⁵⁰ in Nisus' case, his *cupido* is not divine, but exceedingly human.⁵¹ This issue is answered even more directly in Book 10. While chastising Juno for wanting to interfere in the matters of men, Jupiter says:

*...nullo discrimine habebo
 seu fatis Italum castra obsidione tenentur
 siue errore malo Troiae monitisque sinistris.
 Nec Rutulos solvo. sua cuique exorsa laborem
 fortunamque ferent. rex Iuppiter omnibus idem.
 fata uiam inuenient...*

I will consider it with no difference, whether the camp is held in a siege by the Italians through the fates or the unlucky fault and inauspicious omens of the Trojans. Nor do I absolve the Rutulians. Each side will get that labor and fortune that they have begun. King Jupiter is the same to all. Destiny will find a way.
 (10.108-113).

⁴⁸ See Williams, R.D. (1985): 95.

⁴⁹ Nisus prays to Diana in 9.404 but this prayer takes place after Nisus and Euryalus have already made the decisions which lead to their fate. There is also no evidence to conclusively suggest she interferes.

⁵⁰ See Duckworth (1967): 135. Duckworth insists that this question is evidence enough that free will is present. With no divine intervention and with Nisus and Euryalus making mistakes that lead directly to disaster, he argues that the question posed in lines 184-185 has been answered: Nisus' desire is human not divine.

⁵¹ See Otis (1964): 349. Otis deems Nisus' *cupido* to be clearly human and driven by his human environment.

The collocation *sua cuique* echoes Nisus' original question, suggesting a correlation between Nisus' question and Jupiter's response to Juno.⁵² The fact that Jupiter, the king of the gods and the supreme power in the universe, states that mortals can and must create their own destinies supports the interpretation that Nisus is governed by his own desires.⁵³ And, as desires are affected by circumstances, the imminent fighting strongly contributes to Nisus' desires that will result in his and Euryalus' mission and, ultimately, his death and that of Euryalus.

The *dira cupido*⁵⁴ driving Nisus and disrupting his peaceful state is revealed in the subsequent lines as a desire caused by the war and in direct contrast with the ideal state of the lover. He says: *aut pugnam aut aliquid iam dudum invadere magnum / mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est* "for some time now my mind drives me to attempt either battle or some other great act, nor is my mind content with this peaceful quiet" (9.186-187). That Nisus is no longer content with *placida quies* is significant. Peaceful quiet is the ideal state of the lover, who is traditionally viewed as opposed to battle and the military life.⁵⁵ The fact that he is no longer content with this quiet suggests that the war has disrupted his ability to be satisfied solely with the life of a lover. When Nisus and Euryalus decide to embark on the night raid to find Aeneas, they shatter this *placida quies* for good. Life for the two young lovers will never be as easy and peaceful as it was leading up to this moment; they will not return to *placida quies* until Nisus tries to save Euryalus in vain: *exanimus sese proiecit amicum / confossus, placidaque ibi*

⁵² The pairing of a reflexive (*sua*) with a reciprocal (*cuique*) makes this correlation stronger. This collocation also occurs in 10.467-469 which seems to support this contention: *stat sua cuique dies, breue et irreparabile tempus / omnibus est uitae* "his own day stands for each, the time for life is brief and irrecoverable for all."

⁵³ See Duckworth (1967): 136.

⁵⁴ The only other time the phrase *dira cupido* appears in the *Aeneid* is 6.373 where the phrase refers to the desire expressed by Aeneas' dead companion, Palinurus, for Aeneas to take his hand and help him across the River Styx and into the Underworld, despite his body remaining unburied.

⁵⁵ See Ross (2007): 36.

demum morte quievit “having been stabbed he threw himself on his lifeless friend and, in the calm of death, finally rested there” (9.444-445, emphasis mine). This quiet, which was disrupted at the beginning of the passage by human *cupido* influenced by war, is now restored in the permanent quiet of the death that war brings.⁵⁶

While war has disrupted the peaceful state of Nisus and Euryalus, the youths are still motivated by their love for each other (at the expense of the concern for one’s self before all else that war requires), as their subsequent conversation attests. Nisus claims to Euryalus that he is willing to go find Aeneas: *si tibi quae posco promittunt (nam mihi facti / fama sat est)* “if they reward you as I ask (for me fame is enough)” (9.194-195). This claim is significant for two reasons; first, it reinforces Nisus’ concern and care for his *eromenos*, and second, it makes his desire for fame transparent. This desire does not contradict his primary motivation, an experience he can share with Euryalus, as we shall see. As mentioned earlier, all men strive for glory in battle, and Nisus is no different in this respect than Turnus, Pallas, or Aeneas himself.⁵⁷ What makes Nisus different, however, is his intense concern for Euryalus throughout this mission and his desire to share this glory with Euryalus.⁵⁸ This desire to share glory in battle is un-Homeric and stands in contrast to Achilles’ motivations in the *Iliad*; the mingling of the erotic desire to share glory with the Homeric precedent of seeking glory only for one’s self continues the foreshadowing of love’s incompatibility with war being the root cause of Nisus and Euryalus’ failure as Homeric heroes. The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles in the *Iliad* occurs because of Achilles’ unwillingness to share his glory with Agamemnon: “Always the greater part of the painful fighting is the work of / my hands; but when the time comes to

⁵⁶ For more on *placida quies* see Putnam (1995): 298.

⁵⁷ See Poschl (1962): 94.

⁵⁸ Recall the *amor unus* (9.182) discussed in Chapter 1.

distribute the booty / yours is far the greater reward” (1.165-167). Even more interesting a difference is Achilles’ unwillingness to share his glory even with his *erastes*. When Achilles allows Patroclus to put on his armor and fight the Trojans back from the Greek ships, he specifically talks only of his own honor and orders Patroclus to stop once the ships are safe:

“But obey to the end this word I put upon your attention
 so that you can win, for me, great honour and glory
 in the sight of all the Danaans, so they will bring back to me
 the lovely girl, and give me shining gifts in addition.
 When you have driven them from the ships, come back...
 ...[Y]ou must not set your mind on fighting the Trojans, whose delight
 is in battle, without me. So you will diminish my honour.”
 (16.83-87, 89-90)

Achilles thinks only of himself; there is no desire to share his glory with another Greek leader, Agamemnon, or with his *erastes*. Yet in the *Aeneid*, as Nisus states (*aut pugnam aut aliquid*), the actual content of the adventure he desires to undertake is unimportant. He primarily wishes to undertake some action which can serve as a tangible expression of his love for Euryalus and has no qualms about sharing glory with his *eromenos* as evidenced by his claim that the reward should go to Euryalus.⁵⁹ These erotic motivations have minimal consequences in peacetime. Without the war, Nisus might not have felt the *dira cupido* that disrupts his *placida quies*, and, even if he had, he would have been able to undertake a peaceful adventure with Euryalus to satisfy this desire. As it is, however, the war has pushed Nisus to the point where he feels dangerous action must be taken. Nevertheless, he will undertake this action with concern for his *eromenos* foremost in his mind, a concern that conflicts with the concern for one’s self before all else that is required to survive in war.

Additional evidence that the youths care for each other before all else can be found in Nisus’ proposal where he declares that he plans to undertake the venture alone but, in fact, plans

⁵⁹ See Makowski (189): 9.

all along to take Euryalus with him. In response to Nisus' stated plan Euryalus reacts with disbelief and disappointment consistent with his *eromenos* status: *mene igitur socium summis adiungere rebus, / Nise, fugis?* "Nisus, would you therefore avoid having me, your companion, join you in these dangerous matters?" (9.199-200). As he has been Nisus' companion in every situation thus far, it only makes sense to him to join Nisus in this wartime situation, no matter the danger. Euryalus' reaction to the thought of a separation from his *erastes* foreshadows the later evolution of his and Nisus' emotions into confusion and panic at the actual time of separation. Euryalus continues to argue: *est animus lucis contemptor et istum / qui vita bene credit emi, quo tendis, honorem* "my spirit disdains the light and it believes that that glory is well bought with life, wherever you go" (9.205-206). Just as with Nisus, the actual setting of the venture is of secondary importance to Euryalus who is willing to go *quo tendis*.⁶⁰ This response is also exactly what Nisus seeks from his *eromenos*: Euryalus is willing to share the venture, face danger, and even die for his *erastes*.⁶¹ Also, like Nisus, Euryalus seems to desire to share his glory with his companion, which underscores the contrast between the youths' erotic concern for each other and the Homeric nature of their bravery. Nisus expresses his satisfaction with Euryalus' response: *equidem de te nil tale verebar* "I truly feared nothing of such kind from you" (9.207). Nisus half-heartedly continues arguing against Euryalus joining him by stressing his concern for Euryalus' safety and stating that he wants Euryalus to give him a proper burial if he dies. He also argues that he does not want to bring any unnecessary grief to Euryalus' mother. Despite these new arguments, Nisus with his talk of fame and glory has already hooked

⁶⁰ See Makowski (1989): 10.

⁶¹ See Chapter 1 for shared danger as a reflection of an *erastes*' supreme love for his *eromenos*, and vice versa.

Euryalus, who tells Nisus his mind is made up and Nisus' arguments are *inanes* (in vain).⁶²

Nisus' immediate acquiescence to Euryalus reveals that he desires to remain with Euryalus as well and—despite his stated reluctance—had always planned on taking his *eromenos* along, no matter the danger the adult nature of war might present.

What Nisus is unable to tell Euryalus is that the war he is entering into will corrupt his youth and prematurely age him. Words depicting age are significant in this first segment of the Nisus and Euryalus episode. In the course of this wartime mission, Nisus and, most significantly Euryalus, lose their youth and innocence and become men. In the peaceful setting of the foot race in Book 5 and while standing guard in the *placida quies* and in the safety of the Trojans in Book 9, Euryalus had been referred to only as a *puer*.⁶³ Adding to the impression of immaturity, Euryalus is closely associated with Ascanius,⁶⁴ a child himself, and Euryalus' mother is repeatedly mentioned.⁶⁵ Yet *puer* is notably absent from descriptions of Euryalus once he starts out on the venture. As soon as Euryalus leaves camp and takes an active role in war he loses the tag of *puer* and becomes *iuuenis*.⁶⁶ In fact, Vergil noticeably has Nisus refer to Euryalus as *iuuenis* during the night raid. After Nisus notices that Euryalus has been caught, he wonders “by what force, by what arms, he might dare to free the young man” *qua vi iuuenem, quibus audeat*

⁶² *Inanis* and its synonyms (*nequiquam, inrita, frustra*) are prevalent in this passage (219, 313, 364, 389, 398) and constitute another major motif of the Nisus and Euryalus episode. The frequency of these words foreshadows the youths' deaths and makes the hopelessness of their mission clear from the beginning of the passage.

⁶³ See 5.296: *Nisus amore pio pueri*, 5.349: *pueri et palmam movet ordine nemo*, 9.181: *ora puer prima signans intonsa iuventa*, 9.217: *quae te sola, puer*, 9.276: *venerande puer*.

⁶⁴ See 9.275-277: Ascanius addresses Euryalus: *te vero, mea quem spatii propioribus aetas / insequitur, venerande puer iam pectore toto / accipio et comitem casus complector in omnis* “you who truly my age follows in rather close lengths, adored boy, I receive you already with my entire heart and I embrace you as my comrade in all my fortunes.”

⁶⁵ See 9.287-289: Euryalus says to Ascanius: *hanc ego nunc ignaram huius quodcumque pericli / inque salutata linquo...quod nequeam lacrimas perferre parentis* “I leave [my mother] now unaware of this peril such as it is and without saying ‘farewell,’ because I could not bear the tears of a parent.”

⁶⁶ See Petrini (1997): 22.

armis / eripere (9.399-400).⁶⁷ Euryalus, in taking on this mission, has entered the adult world; as a result he prematurely faces all the decisions and consequences that come with it. These consequences end up being especially harsh because, in entering the adult world of war, Nisus and Euryalus fail to leave behind the habits and actions that guided them in the peaceful world of love in which they had heretofore existed.

Chapter 3: Failure to Adopt the Proper Mindset for War

When Nisus and Euryalus present themselves and their plan to retrieve Aeneas to the council of Trojans, it is immediately clear that the war has left the Trojans out of their depth; the inexperience and values of the Trojan leaders will ultimately deceive Nisus and Euryalus and exacerbate the consequences love's incompatibility with war will have on the youths. In Aeneas' absence, the Trojan war-council is governed by the two extremes of Ascanius' youth and Aletes' old age.⁶⁸ Like Euryalus, Ascanius is forced into an active role in the war prematurely. Vergil describes him as "bearing a mind and manly care beyond his years" *ante annos animumque gerens curamque virilem* (9.311). As his extravagant list of promised gifts for Nisus will demonstrate, he appears ill-equipped to handle leadership responsibilities, and it is difficult to see his role in the council as evidence of maturity.⁶⁹ As mentioned before, he is linked to Euryalus, especially after hearing Euryalus' devotion towards his mother: *animum patriae strinxit pietatis imago* "[Ascanius] saw in his mind the image of *pietas* towards a parent" (9.294). This close association with two exemplars of *pietas*, Aeneas and Euryalus, seems to

⁶⁷ See Petrini (1997): 22. Petrini points out that *puerum* and *iuvenem* are metrically equivalent. The fact that they could have been used interchangeably goes to show that the use of *iuvenem* here is very intentional on Vergil's part.

⁶⁸ This use of minor characters taking the prominent roles in council stands in stark contrast to the *Doloneia*, in which the greatest heroes of both the Trojans and Greeks are the active participants in council, and makes the absurdity of the Trojans' situation even more evident.

⁶⁹ Fowler (2000): 89-90.

further highlight Ascanius' shortcomings at the council. Aletes is also out of his element. He is described as "burdened with years" *annis gravis* (9.246),⁷⁰ and he longs for the Trojan glory days of the past: *di patrii...non tamen omnino Teucros delere paratis, / cum talis animos iuvenum et tam certa tulistis / pectora* "Gods of the fathers, nevertheless you are not prepared to destroy the Trojans entirely since you have brought forth youths with such courage and such reliable hearts" (9.247-250).⁷¹ Nevertheless, Nisus and Euryalus have only divulged the outlines of a mission and, in addition to finding Aeneas, admittedly plan on returning "with spoils and vast numbers of murders carried out" *cum spoliis ingenti caede peracta* (9.242). If Nisus and Euryalus are representative of Rome's future strength and virtue, it is troubling that Aletes will promise the youths extravagant gifts after this stated intention of plundering and slaughtering.⁷² It is more troubling if we accept this behavior as part of the system of values Aletes and the Trojan adult community are instilling in the Trojan youth, as Fitzgerald suggests.⁷³ According to Fitzgerald's argument, Nisus and Euryalus, when plundering and slaughtering, are following the heroic code as they have been taught to do their entire lives. Therefore, as the youths' deaths are caused in no small part by the delay caused by their murdering, Fitzgerald concludes that Aletes and the Trojan adults can be viewed as contributing to the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus by deceiving them into believing that their actions are the only way to enter the adult world in war and become heroes.⁷⁴ Even if we do not accept Fitzgerald's argument, Aletes is still to be blamed because he encourages this slaughter and plundering through his consent to the mission even after hearing

⁷⁰Also see 1.121 where Vergil describes Aletes as *grandaevus*.

⁷¹ See Petrini (1997): 28.

⁷² See Fitzgerald (1972): 114. Fitzgerald uses this praise as evidence of the seduction of youth by the adults they are supposed to be able to trust.

⁷³ See Fitzgerald (1972): 116.

⁷⁴ See Casali (2004): 339. Casali supports the contention that Nisus and Euryalus are led astray by the encouragement of the Trojan leaders and claims that they are victims of the external will that is Rome's military ideology.

the youths' intentions. While the over-excitement of Aletes at Nisus and Euryalus' plan can partially be attributed to a camp in distress and confusion in the absence of its leader, his misleading encouragement is pivotal in leading the youths to their death.

In addition to praising the youths, Aletes promises extravagant gifts, which further deceive the youths. Aletes, crying tears of joy, declares: *quae vobis, quae digna, viri, pro laudibus istis / praemia posse rear solvi* "what worthy rewards should I think can be paid to you, men, in return for your glories" (9.253-254). Out of touch with the present realities of war, Aletes allows his imagination to catch hold, much as Ascanius will be seen to do.⁷⁵ Nisus and Euryalus have not accomplished anything yet; they have merely suggested an impulsive idea to travel through the dark, dangerous forest by themselves at night. Yet Aletes, solely based on his pleasure in the youths' passion, is already making promises that: *pulcherrima primum / di...moresque dabunt vestri, tum cetera reddet / actutum pius Aeneas* "the gods and your character will first give you illustrious rewards, then pious Aeneas will immediately give others" (9.253-255). Where Aletes, as a leader, should step in and help the youths reflect on and improve their hastily conceived plan, he instead encourages their youthful zeal by promising gifts from the highest of sources, the gods and even Aeneas himself.⁷⁶ True, Nisus and Euryalus deserve some of the blame for the hastily conceived plan; by not reflecting on their own plan, the youths have maintained their enthusiasm and passion at the expense of logic and safety.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, Nisus and Euryalus are youths, and the lack of an example set by Aletes, who is

⁷⁵ See Petrini (1997): 29. Petrini refers to Aletes as "an old man nostalgic for the past greatness of the race" and Ascanius as "a boy playacting."

⁷⁶ See Fitzgerald (1972): 120-121. With reflection, passion and ardor are likely to wane. Aletes is so focused on the youths' passion that he seems to only desire to increase it with lavish promises of gifts rather than allowing time for reflection which might decrease it.

⁷⁷ See Fitzgerald (1972): 121. Fitzgerald reminds us of the cyclical effect of Nisus and Euryalus being *immemores*. Just as they begin their mission *immemores* of the dangers they will face, Euryalus is captured by the Rutulians because he is *immemor* of the gleam of his plundered helmet (9.374).

supposed to help and support them in this war setting, deceives them into believing their plan is adequate. Furthermore, as a veteran of many wars, Aletes' failure to aid the youths, who are entering their first real battle, in developing a proper mindset for war contributes to Nisus and Euryalus' failure to transition from peacetime to wartime requirements.

Ascanius, guilty of the same deceptive encouragement as Aletes through his own extravagant list of gifts, also contributes to Nisus and Euryalus' inadequate mental states with this promise: *quaecumque mihi fortuna fidesque est / in vestris pono gremiis* "whatever wealth and credit is mine, I place in your lap" (9.260-261). While the just apportioning of war prizes is extremely important in epic poetry, the excessive gifts Ascanius promises are out of proportion with the stakes of the mission and the characters involved.⁷⁸ It is troubling that Ascanius promises them gifts which he does not possess and that are not his to give: *vidisti, quo Turnus equo, quibus ibat in armis / aureus; ipsum illum, clipeum cristasque rubentis / excipiam sorti, iam nunc tua praemia, Nise* "you have seen on which horse and with which arms golden Turnus goes, I shall take out from the allotment, even now as your rewards, Nisus, that horse itself and his shield and red crest" (9.269-271).⁷⁹ It is surprising that Ascanius uses the phrase *iam nunc* in these lines. Turnus' horse and armor still belong to Turnus, and even if the Trojans manage to win the war, and, beyond that, even if Ascanius is allowed to hand out rewards, he will have no say as to who receives the spoils of the Trojans' greatest Italian enemy; that prize is most likely reserved for whoever is able to best Turnus and is ultimately to be determined by Aeneas. A promise such as this offer of Turnus' spoils further proves that Ascanius has allowed his temporary power to overcome his common sense and has forgotten his place; Aeneas is the

⁷⁸ See Petrini (1997): 29.

⁷⁹ See Hardie (194): 122-123.

leader of this war, not he, and it is Aeneas' place to determine who gets what in the case of a favorable outcome. Furthermore, Ascanius directly articulates what spoils Aeneas will give Nisus and Euryalus for their duty: *praeterea bis sex genitor lectissima matrum / corpora captivosque dabit suaque omnibus arma, / insuper his campi quod rex habet ipse Latinus* "Moreover my father will give twelve most excellent bodies of mothers and captives each with all his arms, in addition to these whatever land King Latinus himself holds" (9.272-274). Just as Aletes has done, Ascanius' spends his time at the council offering lavish gifts and excessive praise, deceiving the youths in the sense that he is encouraging their youthful zeal and directing them away from reflection on their hastily conceived plan.

Comparing Ascanius' list of gifts with the gifts promised Odysseus and Diomedes, as well as Dolon, in the *Doloneia* further highlights the importance of gifts proportional to the action undertaken. Nestor makes this promise to whoever volunteers to spy on the Trojans: "all those who hold by the ships high power as princes, / of all these each one of them will give him a black sheep, / female, with a lamb beneath" (*Il.*10.214-216). This gift is simple, yet meaningful, and Odysseus and Diomedes will return alive with great glory to claim it. Similarly, Hector promises a justly apportioned gift to whoever will go spy among the Greeks: "The reward will be one that will suffice him; / for I will give a chariot and two strong-necked horses / who are the finest of all beside the fast ships of the Achaians" (*Il.*10.304-306). Dolon, unlike Odysseus and Diomedes, greedily desires more in order to carry out his mission. He does not want just any chariot and fine pair of horses, he wants those of Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greeks: "Hector...hold up your scepter before me, and swear upon it that you will give me the horses, and the chariot made bright with bronze, that carry the blameless son of Peleus" (*Il.*10.319, 321-

323).⁸⁰ It is important to note that the two established warriors, Odysseus and Diomedes, are content with the humble reward of sheep, while Dolon, a nondescript soldier, desires Achilles' chariot itself.⁸¹ This reward is far beyond his merit, and he justly dies before being able to claim his prize. These examples are not meant to show that an extensive catalogue of gifts is never merited. When the Greeks are losing badly at Troy without Achilles, Agamemnon, through Odysseus, offers him, among many other items, ten talents of gold; twelve of his prize-winning horses; seven women of Lesbos; the girl Briseis, who was the original cause of his quarrel with Agamemnon; and, if the Greeks win the war, as much gold and bronze as his ship can hold, the twenty loveliest Trojan women after Helen, and one of his daughters in marriage with seven citadels as the dowry.⁸² In this case, Achilles is worth an extravagant assortment of gifts for two reasons. Firstly, the Greeks are in danger of losing the war soon without his help, and their ships are in immediate danger.⁸³ Secondly, his honor has been severely compromised and must be restored. However, in Nisus and Euryalus' case, the entire war does not hinge on their mission, nor has their honor been compromised, and Ascanius' promised gifts, in addition to increasing their zealousness, foreshadow their future failure.

The mention of Dido in Ascanius' list of gifts also foreshadows the youths' deaths and highlights the human cost of war. Ascanius promises Nisus and Euryalus "an antique mixing bowl, which Sidonian Dido gave me" *crater antiquum quem dat Sidonia Dido* (9.266). This

⁸⁰ Bear in mind here the similarity to Ascanius' promise to give Nisus and Euryalus Turnus' horse and arms.

⁸¹ See Casali (2004): 328-330: Nisus and Euryalus, like Dolon, are not established heroes, and the promise of such extravagant gifts for heroes not established yet is seen here as especially shameful, although the shamefulness of Nisus and Euryalus is mitigated somewhat by the fact that the gifts are spontaneously offered by Ascanius.

⁸² See *Il.*9.264-306 for the full list of gifts promised to Achilles.

⁸³ See *Il.*9.230-231: Odysseus tells Achilles "There is doubt if we save our strong-beached vessels / or if they will be destroyed, unless you put on your war strength."

mention of Dido is significant because after her death in Book 4 she is mentioned only three times in the narrative (leaving aside her appearance in the Underworld), and each time she is connected with a young man.⁸⁴ Both references in the second half of the *Aeneid* are in tragic circumstances: here when Nisus and Euryalus are departing on their journey, never to return, and in Book 11 at the funeral for the Trojan ally Evander's son, Pallas.⁸⁵ The parallels between Dido and Nisus and Euryalus also go beyond the mere mention of Dido's name. The epithet *infelix* is used to describe Nisus (5.329) much as it is used for Dido, in both cases foreshadowing tragic death.⁸⁶ The themes of tragedy and premature death are strengthened by the close association of Euryalus' mother with Dido through parallelism. Vergil's description of the dawn's light that each woman greets is the same: *et iam prima nouo spargebat lumine terras / Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile* "and now Aurora leaving the yellow bed of Tithonus sprinkles the lands with her first light" (4.584-585 = 9.549-560). In other parts of the *Aeneid* Vergil repeats part of these two lines to introduce dawn, but only in this situation of Book 9 does he replicate them in their entirety. Another parallel may be observed in the position from which each woman observes the tragedy unfolding at dawn: it is from a battlement that Dido views Aeneas and the Trojans leaving Carthage and that Euryalus' mother looks upon her son's head carried on a Rutulian pike.⁸⁷ And, finally, Vergil uses the enjambment of *crudelis*, the last word in a

⁸⁴ See Petrini (1997): 35. Dido is mentioned in connection with Ascanius in 5.571 (significant given his role in the Dido mention in Book 9), Nisus and Euryalus in 9.266, and Pallas in 11.74. In all three instances, her name is brought up because of gifts she gave to the Trojans.

⁸⁵ See 11.72-75: *tum geminas uestis auroque ostroque rigentis / extulit Aeneas, quas illi laeta laborum / ipsa suis quondam manibus Sidonia Dido / fecerat* "then Aeneas brought forth twin robes stiff with gold and purple dye, which Sidonian Dido herself cheerful at her labors had made for him at one time with her hands."

⁸⁶ See Lyne (1987): 230. Dido is referred to as *infelix* at 1.712, 1.749, 4.68, 4.450, and 4.529 and as *misera* at 1.719 and 4.697. By evoking the figure whose death was foreshadowed in Books 1 and 4, Vergil enhances the tragedy and human cost in Nisus and Euryalus' deaths.

⁸⁷ See Petrini (1997): 36 for more analyses of the parallelism between Euryalus' mother and Dido.

description of the grief of Dido and Euryalus' mother, only in these two instances.⁸⁸ The significant association of Dido, a clear symbol of tragedy, with Euryalus' mother and the reminder of her among gifts promised to Nisus and Euryalus highlight the tragedy prevalent in this episode and the human cost involved in wartime settings.

On these inauspicious notes the youths finally depart on their mission. The inadequate ages of Ascanius and Aletes and all the present chieftains are highlighted one more time as the chiefs bid Nisus and Euryalus farewell: *omnis...primorum manus ad portas, iuvenumque senumque, /persequitur* "the entire band of chieftains both young and old follow them to the gates" (9.308-310). Fittingly, this second part of the Nisus and Euryalus episode ends on an ominous note as Ascanius tries to shout last minute mandates to be carried to his father: *sed aurae / omnia discerpunt et nubibus inrita donant* "but the winds scattered all of them and gave them to the clouds in vain" (9.312-313). These mandates are in vain not only because the wind literally disrupts Nisus and Euryalus from hearing Ascanius, but also because Nisus and Euryalus will never reach Aeneas. This imagery, derived from Catullus, is also erotic; in 64, the love poet writes of Ariadne who has been unexpectedly abandoned by Theseus. Ariadne feels she has been deceived and laments that "the airy winds scatter in vain" *aereii discerpunt irrita venti* (142) her desires for marriage and a happy wedding. It is on this erotic note of mangled mandates that Nisus and Euryalus begin their mission.

⁸⁸ See Petrini (1997): 36-37. Euryalus' mother laments at her dead son: *tunc ille senectae / sera meae requies, potuisti linquere solam, / crudelis?* "were you, cruel one, the last respite of my old age, able to leave me alone?" (9.481-483). Similarly, Dido laments at Aeneas' imminent departure: *quin etiam hiberno moliris sidere classem / et mediis properas Aquilonibus ire per altum / crudelis?* "are you preparing your fleet to sail even in winter and do you rush, cruel one, into the middle of northern storms to cross the sea?" (4.309-311).

Chapter 4: The Incompatibility of Love with War

Having set out on this mission trusting in the wisdom of their leaders and in their own abilities to navigate the forest at night, Nisus and Euryalus find themselves further deceived on multiple levels. It soon proves true that Aletes and Ascanius have deceived them by encouraging their zeal and imbuing them with a false sense of patriotism.⁸⁹ Their speeches of Roman virtue and promises of glory and fame motivate Nisus and Euryalus to spend valuable time slaughtering and plundering—a process further signifying their loss of childhood and innocence—in an attempt to achieve the promised glory rather than strictly adhering to their mission and advancing through the fading darkness.⁹⁰ While these actions are acceptable behavior for heroes and a way to achieve glory as shown in Chapter 1, in this case they severely hinder their mission. Nisus eventually notices the fading of night and realizes they have become too preoccupied with killing: *absistamus ait nam lux inimica propinquat* “let us desist, for the unfriendly light draws near” (9.355). Unfortunately, they have already delayed too long and the cavalry that will intercept them has already been sent out to carry messages to Turnus. As Nisus and Euryalus quickly gather up the few spoils they can carry their fate has already been determined. Euryalus snatches up the armor of Rhamnetes and his gold-studded sword belt along with the helmet of Messapus, and he “fits them to his upper arms strong in vain” *umeris nequiquam fortibus aptat* (9.364). This armor will not be able to protect him from the approaching cavalry; his actions along with his strength prove to be useless (*nequiquam*) much like the rest of the mission.⁹¹ In

⁸⁹ See Fitzgerald (1972): 116.

⁹⁰ See Ross (2007): 37.

⁹¹ See Horsfall (1995): 176-177. In contrast to Homer, in Vergil the desire for and wearing of others' arms ends badly (e.g. Turnus' wearing Pallas' sword-belt at 12.941ff). According to proper Roman ideology, your victim's arms should be dedicated to the gods, hung in a palace or temple, or burned in large quantities and never worn with intention to deceive (Aeneas' wearing of Greek armor in 2.396ff is a notable exception and a fatal error he does not make in Italy).

their attempt to prove their manhood and achieve glory in ways suitable to elders such as Aletes and heroes of the past, Nisus and Euryalus doom themselves.

Much as their leaders have deceived them, the land and darkness Nisus and Euryalus thought they knew so well deceives them as well, as Vergil shows through careful word choice. Earlier Nisus had bragged to Aletes and Ascanius: *nec nos uia fallit euntis: /uidimus obscuris primam sub uallibus urbem / uenatu adsiduo et totum cognouimus amnem* “nor will the path deceive us as we go: we have seen the edge of the city beneath hidden valleys regularly during hunting and we are familiar with the entire river” (9.243-245). In addition to trusting in their knowledge of the path, Nisus and Euryalus also count on the safety provided by the darkness of night. However, shortly into their journey, the Italian cavalry notices the two youths because “the helmet betrayed Euryalus who was forgetful of it in the dim shadow of night and facing [the enemy] it flashed with the reflected rays [of the moon]” *galea Euryalum sublustri noctis in umbra / prodidit immemorem radiisque aduersa refulsit* (9.373-374).⁹² The seeming safety of the darkness has made Euryalus careless and now, revealed to the enemy by the moon, their mission is in jeopardy. Accosted by Volcens, the leader of the cavalry, Nisus and Euryalus panic and flee into the dark forest, trusting in the darkness (*fidere nocti* (9.378)). Yet the night that was supposed to be their ally in this mission deceives Euryalus in his panic: *Euryalum tenebrae ramorum onerosaque praeda / impediunt, fallitque timor regione viarum* “the darkness of the branches and his oppressive loot hinder Euryalus and fear deceives him as to the direction of the paths” (9.384-385). Nisus desperately searches for Euryalus, but he must do so while “retracing the entire confusing path of the deceptive forest” *perplexum iter omne revolvens / fallacis silvae*

⁹² See Putnam (1995): 162. Gold’s gleam is Nisus and Euryalus’ undoing here much like it is Camilla’s undoing in 11.768-835 where Camilla, distracted by the gleaming gold of Chloereus, is killed by the spear of Arruns.

(9.391-392); he only stops when he finds Euryalus captured and “already oppressed by the deceit of the ground and the night” *iam...fraude loci et noctis...oppressum* (9.396-398). These words mark the third time in fifteen lines that Vergil refers to the deception facilitated by the night and forest. In light of such heavy emphasis, the reader cannot help but view Nisus and Euryalus at least somewhat sympathetically; they are in this quandary in no little part because of the deception of their leaders and now the betrayal of the night and land they trusted in.⁹³ Also, evident within these lines is the sense of hopelessness for Nisus and Euryalus in this situation. Vergil twice describes their actions as being in vain: Nisus “looks back for his absent friend in vain” *frustra absentem respexit amicum* (9.389) and Euryalus is “struggling in vain” *conantem...frustra* (9.398) after being captured by the Rutulians. Nisus’ earlier assertion that the path was familiar to him has proven premature. With Euryalus captured, Nisus has one last chance to make his Roman duty a priority and save himself and the mission. However, unless Nisus now foregoes his duty as *erastes* and sacrifices his *eromenos* for his Roman duty, the mission will fail and Nisus will die unnecessarily.

Nisus, unable to adopt a proper wartime mentality, determines to save Euryalus, foregoing his life and his Roman duty in the process. Desperate to save his *eromenos*, Nisus finally prays to Diana in her role as the moon goddess after carrying out the entire mission with seemingly no divine motivation,⁹⁴ the lack of which has foreshadowed his and Euryalus’ failure:

⁹³ See Fitzgerald (1972): 123-126. Fitzgerald goes deeper and places much of the blame on Nisus and Euryalus’ stubborn refusal to self-reflect. As stated earlier, I primarily place the blame for this refusal on Aletes and the Trojan leadership due to the youths’ age and inexperience. However, Fitzgerald views the symbolism of night and darkness and the deception of the environment as further evidence of the youths’ unexamined beliefs and values and their attempts to avoid reflecting on them and discovering meaning behind them. He cites the connotations of night—mental darkness, absence of clarity, inability of real perception—as reflecting this belief. While I disagree with the extent of his criticisms of Nisus and Euryalus, for the purposes of this paper it is necessary to be aware that they exist.

⁹⁴ See Duckworth (1967): 359-360. Also see note 49.

tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori, / astrorum decus et nemorum Latonia custos “you goddess who are present, Latonia, glory of the stars and guardian of the woods, assist me with my labors” (9.404-405).⁹⁵ Ironically, Nisus chooses to pray to the moon whose rays had betrayed them by reflecting off Euryalus’ helmet.⁹⁶ This prayer is also odd because it stands in stark contrast to the rest of the mission as no omens were sought before taking off to determine the will of the gods nor was any divine assistance sought.⁹⁷ This earlier lack of attention to the gods may reflect Nisus and Euryalus’ youth and inexperience as heroes. Vergil’s Homeric model for this episode, the *Doloneia*, is relevant here. At the start of his mission Odysseus prays to Athena, thanking her for being always by his side and asking her to ensure he returns safely and with glory.⁹⁸ Diomedes, following his lead, does the same and Athena acknowledges hearing them.⁹⁹ Dolon, on the other hand, forgets to pray before departing. Of course, Dolon is killed and Odysseus and Diomedes return in glory, all of which bode ill for Nisus and Euryalus.¹⁰⁰ When Nisus finally prays to Diana to help guide his spear in his desperate attempt to save Euryalus it is too late to make up for prior neglect.¹⁰¹ Nisus does manage to kill one of the Italians with his spear, but there is no indication that Diana had heard his prayer or aided his throw nor does he ultimately prevail. In light of the Homeric intertext, Vergil’s message seems to be that Nisus and Euryalus should have prayed for assistance from the start, and their leaders

⁹⁵ It is surprising that Nisus prays to Diana, a guardian of the woods, rather than a war god, although this oddity may be explained by the fact that Nisus’ mother, like Diana, is a huntress (9.177-178).

⁹⁶ See Casali (2004): 335.

⁹⁷ See Pollmann (2001): 18.

⁹⁸ See *Il.* 10.278-282. Odysseus prays again to Athena at *Il.* 10.462-464 dedicating his and Diomedes’ spoils to her.

⁹⁹ See *Il.* 10.284-295.

¹⁰⁰ See Casali (2004): 335.

¹⁰¹ See Pollmann (2001): 18.

should have ensured they took the proper steps to secure divine assistance before ever leaving camp; now it is too late, just as it is too late to save Euryalus.

Realizing that Euryalus is going to die, Nisus takes the blame upon himself rather than blaming the Trojan leaders or the darkness of the forest at night for deceiving them. Shortly after praying to Diana, Nisus pointedly shouts: *me, me adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum / o Rutuli* “I am present, I who have done it, turn your sword on me o Rutulians!” (9.427-428). Three times in this line he highlights himself with the word *me*, a repetition which is all the more emphasized by the lack of grammatical dependence for the extra *me*.¹⁰² Further emphasizing his role in the deception Nisus then laments: *mea fraus omnis, nihil iste nec ausus / nec potuit...tantum infelicem nimium dilexit amicum* “the whole fraud is mine, that one intended nothing, he was not able...he just loved his unlucky friend too much” (9.428-430). The fact that Nisus takes full responsibility for Euryalus’ presence shows that he finally realizes that Euryalus has been following his zealous example and it is this adulation that led Euryalus to participate in the mission. However, when the *Doloneia* is taken into consideration, it appears that, despite Nisus’ own beliefs, true blame lies elsewhere. When caught by Odysseus and Diomedes, Dolon assigns responsibility to Hector despite his own role in desiring Achilles’ horses: “Hektor has led my mind astray with many deceptions / he promised me the single-foot horses of proud Achilleus” (10.391-392). By analogy, the fact that Nisus—who has been modeled on Dolon in his lack of attention towards the gods and missteps during the night raid—accepts the blame suggests, as Casali has argued, that responsibility has to be shifted to others.¹⁰³ At the same time, Vergil does seem to imply that Nisus should have insisted on Euryalus staying back instead

¹⁰² See Fitzgerald (1972): 149.

¹⁰³ See Casali (2004): 340. Casali suggests shifting responsibility to the consolidated system of values, obedience to superiors, and false values espoused by the Trojan adults.

of encouraging his excess.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, Nisus now has to experience the anguish that he has led his *eromenos* into death; his own role in the deception can be added to the other deceptive agents (the Trojan leaders, the forest, the darkness) that contribute to his and Euryalus' death and compound their inability to transition to a proper wartime mentality.

Chapter 5: The Costs of Love Mixing with War

When Euryalus dies, Vergil uses a flower simile that in its similarities to Homer's flower simile for Gorgythion emphasizes war's tragic corruption of youth and beauty as the costs of war. Euryalus' beauty in death is highlighted by the description: *pulchrosque per artus / it cruor inque umeros* "blood went down his beautiful limbs and onto his shoulders" (9.433-434). In addition, his youth and beauty are further highlighted in the flower simile:

... *cervix conlapsa recumbit
purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro
languescit moriens, lassove papavera collo
demisere caput pluvia cum forte gravantur.*

his drooping neck reclined, just as when a purple flower cut down by a plow, dying, becomes faint, or poppies with weary necks drop their heads when by chance they are weighed down by a shower.
(9.434-437)

Vergil seems to lessen the magnitude of this death by describing the poppies as having weary (*lasso*) necks as if death and the rest it entails are welcome after the exhausting deception and loss of innocence the night mission provided.¹⁰⁵ A precursor to the poppy falling under the rain in the second half of Vergil's simile, the beautiful Gorgythion, in Homer, struck by an arrow, "bent drooping his head to one side, as a garden poppy / bends beneath the weight of its yield and the rains of springtime" (*Il.*8.306-307). Of significance in this simile is Homer's emphasis

¹⁰⁴ See Duckworth (1967): 139. Duckworth points out that Nisus has now twice accused Euryalus of excess, both times using the word *nimum*: at 9.354 when he senses that Euryalus is carried off by too much desire for killing, and here at 9.430 when he says he loved his unlucky friend (Nisus) too much.

¹⁰⁵ See Pavlock (1985): 216.

on Gorgythion's parentage. He is described as "a strong son of Priam... whose mother was lovely Kastianeira, Priam's bride from Aisyme, with the form of a goddess" (*Il.*8.302-304). In this instance we have the intensity of beauty and youth, emphasized through Gorgythion's parentage, lost prematurely and tragically, just as the beauty of the poppy is cut down by a downpour.¹⁰⁶ Gorgythion is also an accidental death, killed by the cruel hazards of war;¹⁰⁷ the Greek Teucer was aiming for the Trojan hero Hector and, missing, hit Gorgythion. But the deaths of Gorgythion and Euryalus are more than tragic casualties that occur in war; they represent the ability of war to corrupt youth and beauty. In Euryalus' case, the flower simile emphasizes the costs—the lost youth and beauty in addition to death—that he suffers for having entered war prematurely and without a proper mindset.

For this simile Vergil looks to not only Homer but also Catullus, and uses the similarities to Catullus' flower similes to emphasize Euryalus' loss of innocence and his eroticism.¹⁰⁸ In Catullus 11, which is also indebted to Homer, the poet bitterly bids farewell to his former mistress Lesbia, an adulteress, whom he now realizes will never love him. Referencing an image of a plow which Vergil will borrow, he laments: *nec meum respectet, ut ante amorem, / qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati / ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam / tactus aratro est* "let her no longer look back for my love, as before, which has fallen because of her fault, just like the flower of the farthest field has been killed after the passing of the plow" (11.21-24). Catullus' *amor* exists in a world that is set apart (*prati ultimi*) because of its innocence and purity, a world that is opposed by the greater world with its adulterers where true love cannot exist.¹⁰⁹ This contrast between

¹⁰⁶ See Pratt Jr. (1956): 342.

¹⁰⁷ See Johnson (1976): 63-64.

¹⁰⁸ See Lyne (1987): 229. Lyne claims that the flower simile is erotic as evidenced by Catullus' use and, before that, Sappho's use.

¹⁰⁹ See Petrini (1997): 46.

the two worlds is strikingly similar to the worlds in which Nisus and Euryalus exist. In their private, peaceful world (i.e. the world of Book 5), the youths' love thrives, remaining pure and uncorrupted by outside influences. However, war forces the youths into the outside adult world where their inability to adjust and leave behind their lovers' attitude leads to their deaths and ultimately, the end of their love. Euryalus, in going on this mission, has lost all the things that made him special: his youth, beauty, and deep connection with his mother. Eventually his *erastes*' and his own life are all taken by the war.¹¹⁰ Nisus and Euryalus are also similar to Catullus in their *pietas*; Catullus himself has lived a life of *pietas*, praying to the gods in poem 76 on the brink of death for mercy in return: *o di, reddite mi hoc propietate mea* "o gods, render me this in return for my *pietas*" (76.26).¹¹¹ If we agree with Petrini that Catullus asserts in poem 76 that the failings of his private world, the loss and pain, are universal and timeless, the similarities between Catullus' situation, as given in poem 11, and that of Euryalus are even more striking.¹¹² Indeed, the flower whose demise represents the loss of innocence for Catullus and Euryalus can only thrive and blossom in the circumstances presented in the marriage hymn of Catullus 62:

*Ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,
ignotus pecori, nullo convolsus aratro,
quem mulcent aerae, firmat sol, educat imber;
multi illum pueri, multae optavere puellae:
idem cum tenui carptus defloruit ungui,
nulli illum pueri, nullae optavere puellae:
sic virgo, dum intacta manet, dum cara suis est;
cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem,
nec pueris iucunda manet, nec cara puellis.*

Like a flower, born in secluded gardens, unknown to the livestock, uprooted by no plow, which the breezes caress, the sun strengthens, the rain nurtures: many boys and many girls have desired it. Similarly, when it is plucked by a thin fingernail, no boys and no girls seek it. Thus is a young woman, as long as she remains untouched, as long she is dear to her own; but when she has lost her

¹¹⁰ See Petrini (1997): 47.

¹¹¹ See Lee (1979): 20.

¹¹² See Petrini (1997): 40-47 for more on similarities between Catullus' *pathos* and the *pathos* present in much of the *Aeneid*.

chaste flower because of her polluted body, she remains neither pleasant for boys nor dear to girls.
(Cat.62.40-48)

Catullus 62 shows us that it is possible for the flower (representing innocence) to remain “unplucked” as long as it remains hidden and private. Nevertheless, in 11 Catullus’ *amor* for Lesbia proves incompatible in the adulterous world in which he exists, and Catullus has his childlike innocence unexpectedly torn from him by Lesbia’s betrayal when his flower becomes unhidden, that is, when his love affair with Lesbia enters the outside world. Similarly, in Vergil the innocence of Euryalus’ love is proven incompatible in the heroic world of war, and Euryalus, like Catullus, abruptly loses his innocence when his ideal love for Nisus enters the setting of war, exposing his flower to outside influences.¹¹³ This loss of innocence and loss of love, like the loss of beauty and youth, is another cost of Euryalus entering war prematurely.

The Greek lyric poet Sappho, working off of Homer’s flower similes, influenced both Catullus and Vergil, and Vergil’s borrowing of Sappho’s purple flower image further highlights the loss of innocence and beauty.¹¹⁴ Surviving from her work is the simile: “like the hyacinth which the shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains, and on the ground the purple flower” (Hardie transl. 105c).¹¹⁵ The color purple is often used to represent the bright glow of youth and flowers to denote the bloom of youth, and both Vergil and Sappho write of a purple flower being destroyed.¹¹⁶ The overarching effect of the similarities between Vergil’s simile and the similes

¹¹³ See Petrini (1997): 46.

¹¹⁴ See Hardie (1994): 150.

¹¹⁵ See Makowski (1989): 14. Makowski, referencing Servius (*habetur ratio comparationis: videtur enim Euryalo Hyacinthum comparare, qui pulcherrimus fuit et post mortem conversus in florem est*), argues that if Vergil did indeed intend to suggest a comparison of Euryalus to Hyacinth, the *eromenos* of Apollo who in death is immortalized as a flower, then the flower simile for Euryalus is even more proof that Vergil intended Nisus and Euryalus to be viewed as *erastes* and *eromenos*.

¹¹⁶ See Makowski (1989): 14. Also see Hardie (1994): 151. *Purpureus* is used in this way elsewhere in the *Aeneid* at 1.591 and 11.819.

of Homer, Catullus, and Sappho is the destruction of the beautiful and innocent, in Vergil's case by the violence of war. Vergil gives Euryalus a hero's death through the similarities to Homer while still highlighting its needlessness through the similarities to Catullus.¹¹⁷ Most importantly, through this flower simile and all of its models, Vergil is able to emphasize the costs of lovers entering war.

Chapter 6: Nisus and Euryalus' Legacy

Following Nisus and Euryalus' deaths and concluding the night raid episode Vergil praises the youths with an extended apostrophe that in addition to stating the power of his poetry seems to point to love's inability to coexist with war as the reason for the youths' deaths. An apostrophe's purpose is to shift from objectivity to subjectivity as the author guides the response of the readers by verbalizing his or her own emotional feelings.¹¹⁸ In the longest and most emphatic apostrophe in the epic Vergil guides his readers to view Nisus and Euryalus' deaths as a necessary part of Aeneas' war:

*Fortunati ambo! Si quid mea carmina possunt,
nulla dies unquam memori vos eximet aevo,
dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.*

Fortunate pair! If my poems can do anything, no day will ever remove you from the memory of time, while the house of Aeneas will dwell on the immobile rock of the Capitoline and the father of the Romans will have power.
(9.446-449)

Vergil explicitly reveals the power of the poet and his ability to reward minor characters such as Nisus and Euryalus with lasting fame.¹¹⁹ Some scholars view Vergil's praise as a reward paralleling the prizes proffered by Aeneas in Book 5; these scholars claim that in both cases

¹¹⁷ See Ross (2007): 38. The similarities to Catullus may also highlight Nisus and Euryalus' eroticism.

¹¹⁸ See Block (1982): 9.

¹¹⁹ See Hardie (1994): 153.

Nisus and Euryalus are rewarded for their love-oriented actions.¹²⁰ I agree that rewards are given in both cases, but not with the assertion that Nisus and Euryalus' reward at the end of their night raid is equivalent to their reward after the foot race. While lasting fame is a reward, they pay for it with their lives, whereas in Book 5 they sacrifice nothing for their prizes. The key distinction is that in Book 5 Nisus and Euryalus' individualistic actions have no negative consequences because they are operating in a peaceful setting; in the wartime setting of Book 9, Nisus and Euryalus' actions do have consequences and they lose their lives. The fact that the two episodes are parallel up to this point gives greater emphasis to the tragic consequences of love attempting to coexist with wartime needs.

Exactly what this apostrophe means remains ambiguous, but no matter how a reader views it, the incompatibility of love with war remains. Vergil intentionally has pulled us in two conflicting directions, compelling us to both admire and condemn Nisus and Euryalus for their actions throughout the episode;¹²¹ we may feel sympathy for the youths and we can admire the youths' courage and reciprocal devotion even though we cannot admire their violent actions.¹²² But regardless of whether we view Nisus and Euryalus with sympathy and/or negatively, critical questions remain. Does Vergil actually see Nisus and Euryalus' deaths as good fortune rather than tragedy? His response certainly seems at odds with the narrative itself which appears to present their deaths as pitiful and senseless.¹²³ Recognizing this emotional effect of the narrative, can it truly be that Vergil instructs his readers to view the episode with a cold detachment as this apostrophe which links the fame of Nisus and Euryalus to the permanence of

¹²⁰ See Bleisch (2001): 188-189.

¹²¹ See Horsfall (1995): 178.

¹²² See Johnson (1976): 62.

¹²³ See Block (1982): 19. Also see Ross (2007): 38. Ross suggests the apostrophe is meant to have a tone of ambivalent irony in order to address this contradiction between Vergil's words and the way he portrays the episode.

Rome seems to imply? Does he really want his readers to think only of the greater meaning of the war and to accept the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus as a necessary sacrifice within the ultimate goal of establishing Rome? While scholars differ in their answers to these questions, one fact remains constant in Vergil's apostrophe: Nisus and Euryalus' death is not their own fault. Love's incompatibility with war exacerbated by the deception of their leaders and surroundings are the cause. Whether their deaths are deserved or not, whether their loss of life represents a tragedy or a joyful patriotic sacrifice, is irrelevant.

The tension between the sympathetic way in which Vergil writes the narrative of Nisus and Euryalus and his ambiguous apostrophe to them deepens in Book 10 with Vergil's other apostrophes for youths in the *Aeneid*, making it appear that the deaths of young men in war—in particular young men who value honor over life¹²⁴—are more important to him than the overarching Roman cause. He praises the youth Pallas at his death:

*o dolor atque decus magnum rediture parenti,
haec te prima dies bello dedit, haec eadem aufert,
cum tamen ingentis Rutulorum linquis aceruos!*

O sadness and great glory soon to return to your parent, this first day has carried you into war, this same day has carried you away, nevertheless with great masses of Rutulians left behind!
(10.507-509)

While Vergil does not directly promise him immortality, this apostrophe focusing on Pallas' glory ensures it. Similarly, Vergil praises the Italian youth Lausus before his death:

*Hic mortis durae casum tuaque optima facta.
Si qua fidem tanto est operi latura vetustas,
non equidem nec te, iuvenis memorande, silebo—*

Here was the misfortune of a harsh death and your best deeds. If any long passage of time will bring credence to so great an effort, truly, mindful of your youth, I will not be silent.
(10.791-793).

¹²⁴ See Horsfall (1995): 171. Euryalus, Pallas, and Lausus all fit this description.

As with Pallas, Vergil praises a youth who dies tragically in war, although this time the youth being praised is one of the Italian enemies. Despite Pallas and Lausus' differences in this regard, earlier in the battle Vergil directly equates them to emphasize their similarities: *hinc Pallas instat et urget, / hinc contra Lausus, nec multum discrepat aetas, / egregii forma, sed quis Fortuna negarat / in patriam reditus* "from here Pallas moved forward and advanced, from there Lausus advanced to meet him, nor did their ages differ much, both with handsome bodies, but for who Fortune denied a return home" (10.433-436).¹²⁵ In addition, Pallas and Lausus, much like Nisus and Euryalus, share the virtues of bravery and *pietas*.

The sympathy evoked and immortality promised to Lausus is also similar to what is promised Nisus and Euryalus, yet the fact that it is for a Roman enemy further calls into question the justifiability of the Latin war and contradicts the implications of the Nisus and Euryalus apostrophe.¹²⁶ Nisus and Euryalus, along with Pallas, are praised for dying for the Roman cause, yet Lausus is praised for dying while trying to prevent the Roman cause from being achieved. Therefore there must be something more important to Vergil than the overarching Roman cause. Keeping in mind the subjects of these three apostrophes, it appears that Vergil has reserved the power of immortality for youths of high character who die prematurely because of war. As apostrophes in Vergil are rare,¹²⁷ it appears that Vergil finds something especially tragic and wrong in war claiming the lives of virtuous youths. Nevertheless, it seems that for Lausus and

¹²⁵ See Block (1982): 21.

¹²⁶ See Block (1982): 21.

¹²⁷ See Block (1982): 13.

Pallas Vergil strives to show that death is not futile, and youth, courage, and *pietas* can compensate for other failures.¹²⁸

As for Nisus and Euryalus, I believe Vergil chooses to praise the youths because they are able to escape the horrors of war and die together while never forsaking their love for each other. Euryalus is *fortunatus* because he did not die alone and abandoned, while Nisus is *fortunatus* because he did not abandon his *eromenos* and, consequently, his death on his *eromenos*' behalf was noble.¹²⁹ Vergil's apostrophe would then appear to support Nisus' decision to sacrifice himself for Euryalus and to make the statement that their courage, *pietas*, and self-sacrifice for love will outlast death.¹³⁰ While war claims the corporeal form of Nisus and Euryalus' love, the apostrophe proves it cannot claim the memory of their love and *pietas*.

Conclusion:

Vergil's apostrophe, combined with the other evidence examined in this thesis, confirms love's incompatibility with war as an adequate overarching source of blame for Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. All the other suggested sources of blame either appear insignificant or can be seen as supporting this blanket theory. However, viewing love's incompatibility with war as the source of blame does not prove satisfying nor does it explain the fascination scholars have with Nisus and Euryalus.

Suggested sources of blame that upon closer analysis appear insignificant include Nisus and Euryalus' homosexuality, the youths' desires for glory and killing, the failures of the Trojan leaders, and the deception of the forest and darkness. Keeping in mind Vergil's literary and

¹²⁸ See Horsfall (1995): 173.

¹²⁹ See Williams, C. (1995): 534. He views Nisus and Euryalus as worthy of the epithet (*fortunati*) because loving one another, they died together.

¹³⁰ See Makowski (1989): 15.

philosophical models, Nisus and Euryalus fit the *erastes-eromenos* model praised in the *Symposium*, which suggests that their homosexual relationship should not be blamed for their deaths. Furthermore, the parallels between Nisus and Euryalus and Odysseus, Diomedes, and Dolon in the *Doloneia* suggest that the youths' desire for glory and killing can also not be blamed. On the other hand, while the failures of the Trojan leaders, Aletes and Ascanius in particular, are relevant, they only serve to exacerbate the situation rather than cause Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. Similarly, the deception of the forest and darkness only intensifies the consequences of love's incompatibility with war for Nisus and Euryalus.

The other evidence we are left with all seems to support the thesis that love's incompatibility with war should be blamed. The lack of meaningful consequences for Nisus and Euryalus' actions in the peaceful setting of Book 5, in contrast with the consequences in the wartime setting of Book 9, highlight the appropriateness of this thesis. As love is the primary motivation for Nisus and Euryalus' actions in both Book 5 and Book 9, it seems that it is love's interaction with war that leads to the youths' deaths. Further supporting this notion, Nisus' hopeless attempt to save Euryalus, resulting in both of their deaths, is motivated solely by his love for his *eromenos*. Furthermore, war disrupts Nisus' peaceful state as a lover and is the primary influence behind his unrest that leads to the mission. Once in war, Nisus and Euryalus are unable to leave behind their love, as evidenced by Nisus' attempt at Euryalus' rescue. In contrast to the heroic precedent of seeking glory for one's self, Nisus and Euryalus desire to share their glory with each other, revealing their love as the probable cause for their failure as heroes.

The costs of love's incompatibility with war prove to be many. The flower simile at Euryalus' death illustrates all that he has lost: his youth, beauty, innocence, and life. Similarly,

Nisus loses his innocence and life. Vergil's apostrophe praising the youths at their deaths shows that Nisus and Euryalus will be remembered for their love, as the details of their story reveal, but the remembrance comes at a steep price.

Trying to blame love's incompatibility with war for Nisus and Euryalus' death is perhaps not entirely satisfying. While it helps explain their deaths, it does not explain why their deaths are so moving, nor does it give us a tangible source of blame, as faulting Nisus and Euryalus themselves or the Trojan leaders would do. Furthermore, it is not particularly stunning. Love and war are naturally in conflict and it would be surprising if they were able to coexist peacefully. Love leading to tragedy and death is an unfortunate necessity in war, as other lovers in literature, such as Achilles and Patroclus as Plato views them, can attest.

Knowing that tragedy is almost inevitable when love and war mix, is searching for blame an appropriate approach to understanding the significance of the Nisus and Euryalus episode? While it is not fair to assign blame to a near tautology, I believe searching for blame within this episode is important for what it reveals about Vergil and the framework of the *Aeneid*. In the course of this paper I have discovered that much of the scholarship searching for blame has arisen from Vergil's ambiguity about the morality of Nisus and Euryalus' actions throughout the episode. However, I believe Vergil's ambiguity goes beyond vagueness and is meant to express his ambivalence; Vergil does not ask us to choose one single reading of the episode. There are many possible readings and many possible causes of Nisus and Euryalus' deaths, and none is more right than any other. Vergil wants different readers to experience different emotions and for individual readers to even experience conflicting emotions. It is this experience of fluctuating emotions that makes the Nisus and Euryalus episode so poignant and personal for scholars. As a result, we can admire Nisus and Euryalus' courage and effort in the complicated,

unfamiliar world of war and understand the reasoning behind their actions, while still not having to agree with those actions.

That Vergil appears to want us to experience conflicting emotions—as the back and forth admiration and condemnation for the youths’ actions he plays upon throughout the episode suggests—is important within the framework of the *Aeneid* outside of Book 9. The ending of the *Aeneid* has generated intense amounts of scholarship, and it appears that scholars flock to Aeneas’ killing of Turnus for the same reason the Nisus and Euryalus episode is so important to them. In Book 12 Vergil invites conflicting emotions as in Book 9; at the same time we feel both admiration for Aeneas killing his archenemy and avenging Pallas, and condemnation that Aeneas, the exemplar of *pietas*, would kill a helpless supplicant who has begged for his life. The lessons of Book 9 can be applied to Book 12 to help alleviate this seeming contradiction. As Nisus and Euryalus have shown us, Aeneas’ action does not have to be viewed as completely right or wrong; in Vergil’s understanding of war it is never that easy. Aeneas, like Nisus and Euryalus, is a flawed human striving to do his best in the complicated world of war, and for that we can admire his courage and effort and understand his action, while still not approving of it.

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