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## Fama and Fiction in Vergil's Aeneid

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# 5

## Matter out of Place II

### Nisus and Euryalus

The *Aeneid* makes *pietas* central to the work of shaping *fama* materially as well as verbally, as we saw in chapter 3. *Pietas* valorizes forms of remembrance intense enough to cross boundaries of time, space, knowledge, and mortality. It helps *fama* cross these boundaries partly through a logic of restitution that relies both on ritual and rhetoric—or rather on the rhetoric of ritual. *Pietas* makes room for limitless exchanges between material “this’s” and figurative “thats.” The poem emphasizes how unstable the imaginative substitutions may become in this restitutive process. Chapter 4 examined some of the ways the *Aeneid* draws attention to this instability precisely through its medium *as* a poem, a verbal artifact. For visible and tangible objects to take their place in poetic *fama*, help is required from the minds of readers and listeners.

Ambivalence about what constitutes both *pietas* and *fama*—as well as ambivalence about the interaction of *pietas* and *fama*—emerges within the *Aeneid*’s story world, as well as through its poetic medium. After the madness spread by *Allecto* has permeated Latium, and the peace has been defiled (*polluta pace*, 7.467), the difficulty of recognizing (in Aristotle’s terms) a “that” in a “this,” or seeing “what properly goes with what” (as in Burke’s

description of piety), becomes increasingly painful—for characters within the fiction as well as for the poem's readers.

In Book 9, while Aeneas is finding allies at Evander's city Pallanteum, the other Trojans are trapped and on guard in their encampment. Turnus' Rutulian followers have set up a night siege, but one of the young Trojans on watch duty—Nisus—notices that the Rutulians' overconfidence has thrown them into sleepy and drunken disarray, and points this out to his beloved Euryalus. Perhaps now is the time for action? The whole Trojan community, populace and leaders alike (mentioned in the politically loaded formulation *populusque patresque*, 9.192), want Aeneas to know precisely how things stand. "If they promise you what I demand (since the *fama* of the deed is enough for me)," Nisus thinks aloud to Euryalus, "under that hill I see myself being able to track down the path towards the walls and city of Pallanteum."<sup>1</sup>

For Euryalus' lover Nisus, when he first conceives the plan that leads to both their deaths, *fama* is to serve as reward. He desires for himself *fama* alone, as an abstraction—and he also wishes this *fama* to take the tangible form of gifts for his beloved (9.194–95). But the boy Euryalus is no less eager to buy *honor* with his life (9.206). Though Nisus lists reasons for him to stay safe (if things should go wrong, Euryalus might perform death rituals for him, and Nisus is anxious to avoid terrible grief for Euryalus' mother), these worries do not change Euryalus' mind.

When they tell the Trojan leaders about their intent, Aeneas' son Ascanius fulfills the hope Nisus had expressed on Euryalus' behalf, and translates *fama* into gifts that will honor the young men risking their lives amid the enemy lines to find his father. He marks out the value of their intentions by carefully imagining the rewards for their success. The prizes that Ascanius lists offer a kind of anticipatory commemoration of Nisus and Euryalus' actions. The gifts are worked out so precisely and so extravagantly as to alter the character of the venture. In the event, Nisus and Euryalus are distracted from the vicarious *pietas* of their mission to Aeneas. Instead they enter into the polluting bloodiness of a crazed attack on their sleeping enemy; eventually they themselves are found out and killed and their bodies are in turn defiled by vengeful dismemberment.

When Nisus and Euryalus come back to the Trojan camp, their bodies have been given over to their enemies' anger. Euryalus' grieving mother is confounded by the need to recognize "this" severed head as her son (*hunc*

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1. *si tibi quae posco promittunt (nam mihi facti / fama sat est) tumulto uideor reperire sub illo / posse uiam ad muros et moenia Pallantea*, 9.194–96.

*ego te, Euryale, aspicio?* 9.481), when she looks out from the battlements of the Trojan encampment to see the young men's grim return from their attempted sortie. This suffering is what *fama* means to the unnamed mother. *Fama* is the messenger that rushes to her on wings and slips into her ears (9.473–75), just in case she should remain comfortably unaware of the news that angry Rutulians are confronting the besieged Trojans with their young heroes' heads on spikes.

The boy Euryalus' death and dismemberment in Book 9 can be cleansed temporarily by epic commemoration—the poet's voice transforms his spilled blood into the color of a poppy. But through his mother's lament, the poem also invites us to visualize a kind of mutual contamination. The fragmented body of Euryalus pollutes the Italian landscape, while that land estranges the body. The boy's mutilation, through which he becomes something so distorted that it is barely recognizable for his mother, also mirrors the unfamiliarity of the land that must become home for the Trojans in their exile.<sup>2</sup>

Women in classical cultures generally have a special role in memory, because of their particular responsibilities for many of the duties to the dead, including the communication of grief in the ritualized form of lamentation.<sup>3</sup> The lament of Euryalus' mother in Book 9 becomes one of the fundamental constituents of the epic's imaginative remembrance and intensifies the displacement of matter out of place, calling into question just what it would mean for the living and the dead to find their home. The narrative of Nisus and Euryalus in Book 9 layers multiple perceptions of the story it tells. It offers readers the possibility of seeing the Trojan presence in Italy simultaneously as invasion and as continued exile, not a homecoming. So the *Aeneid* makes room for competing visions of *fama*, which shake any easy assumption that its heroes will in fact reach their place, either materially or in memory.

## 5.1 *Fama* evaluated

Nisus and Euryalus initially enter the *Aeneid*'s narrative in Book 5, where Trojan *pietas* takes the form of memorial games for Anchises. The distinc-

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2. For comparison with the landscape that memorializes Palinurus, and with Deiphobus' empty tomb, whose recognizability contrasts with the disfiguration of the individuals in death, see Feldherr 1999, 119.

3. Many cultures strongly associate the gossip-borne elements of *fama* with women. It is still an open question, though, whether Roman culture is one of those that characterize rumor generation and scandal mongering as feminine.

tion of each competitor is marked out in tangible form by *pater* Aeneas as umpire and prize-giver. In this situation, such materialized *fama* is valued both as a legitimate end in itself (though the worth of this visible and tangible evaluation is not unquestioned, even here), and as an aspect of the *pietas* displayed by Aeneas and by the Trojan communities who commemorate Anchises' death.

The scenario in Book 5 foreshadows in many ways the story of Nisus and Euryalus told in Book 9. And even in Book 5 we are reminded that a competitive renewal of *fama* is not the only way to commemorate the dead. The Trojan women, away from the games, mingle lament for Anchises with grief over their past and future, as they look out at the sea's vastness and dread its unending prospect. Iris merely heightens and redirects the women's existing emotions and thoughts when she possesses them with Junonian madness and inspires them to set alight the Trojan ships, a spur to action that will direct their own future.<sup>4</sup> The goddess' intervention precipitates a division between the fighting men who will carry on the quest for their Italian home, and the women who stay in Sicily to form part of Acestes' community.

The poem presents *fama* as a motive for attending and participating in the games.<sup>5</sup> The narrative of Book 5 looks for continuity between the Augustan present and its imagined past. It helps contemporary Romans trace ancestral names to legendary competitors and project contemporary practices onto Trojan customs. But *Fama* can obscure the past as well as providing access to it. Aeneas promises that no one will go unrewarded in the contest in which Nisus and Euryalus compete; he enumerates the gifts that will go to all, as well as the special prizes for the top three. When the poem lists the runners of the race, however, we learn that there were many more participants than those named, but despite the gifts, shadowy *fama* buries them (*multi praeterea, quos fama obscura recondit*, 5.302). Aeneas' generosity is insufficient, evidently, to overcome the vagaries of time and memory.

Here in Book 5, we get to know Nisus and Euryalus as a Trojan equivalent to an Athenian couple, with Nisus as *erastes* (lover) and Euryalus as *erômenos* (beloved). Nisus is as remarkable for his *pius* love as Euryalus is for his beauty and fresh youthfulness (*Euryalus forma insignis uiridique iuuenta, /*

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4. Panoussi 2009, 166–73 emphasizes the role of women's ritual lament in Book 5 and Book 9, arguing that the violence erupting into the memorial games “underscores the fragility of the new civic identity and its ability to stop reciprocal violence” (173).

5. The *fama* and *nomen* of Acestes (the ruler of the Trojan–Sicilian community where Anchises is buried) attract neighboring peoples to the celebrations (5.106); Acestes later provokes the aging boxer Entellus to fight by reminding him of his *fama* (5.392) and the spoils he has previously won; Entellus is drawn, though he pointedly denies being motivated, by *dona*.

*Nisus amore pio pueri*, 5.295–96).<sup>6</sup> *Pius* here suggests above all a capacity for devoted remembrance, so Nisus' love for Euryalus is linked with the *pietas* of the games as death honors for Anchises. In this section of the poem, the adjective *pius* points towards the imminent foot race, where Nisus will not forget his love, helping Euryalus even once he himself is out of the running (5.334, *non tamen Euryali, non ille oblitus amorum*). The link between *pietas* and memory established by the race in Book 5 foreshadows the recompense Nisus will eventually make for temporary forgetfulness after he escapes their enemies without Euryalus in 9.386 (*imprudens euaserat hostis*). But *pius amor* also suggests purity unsullied by the gore (*cruor*) with which Nisus and Euryalus will be smeared—first when Nisus falls in a mixture of animal filth and *sacro cruore* during the footrace (5.333), and eventually when both end up as bloody emblems of the sheer destructiveness of battle (9.472).<sup>7</sup>

In Book 5, Aeneas' role as lavish gift giver helps clean up the mess from the race in which Nisus and Euryalus compete. Nisus runs faster than everyone else, but loses his victory when he finds himself face down in the slippery filth left over from the sacrifices that began the celebrations. For Euryalus' sake he carefully fouls the next best runner, who is indignant at losing his prize to Euryalus, but Euryalus' *virtus* is valued more highly for being placed in a lovely body and his becoming tears elicit sympathy all round.<sup>8</sup> Aeneas

6. The depiction of the pair as *erastes* and *erômenos* does more than evoke debates over the role of erotic ties in strengthening military courage (see, e.g., *Symposium* 178c–179b). It also complicates the function of the memorial games in Book 5, given their obvious intertextual connection with the funeral games organized by Achilles for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23 (Achilles and Patroclus are not presented in Homer as lover and beloved, but are regarded as such in classical Athens, e.g., Aeschines *against Timarchos* 133, 142–50): the games proleptically memorialize Nisus and Euryalus' deaths. Otis 1964, 273–74 emphasizes the links between Book 5 and Book 9.

7. It has been pointed out to me that this sacrificial *cruor* also marks a shift in poetic decorum from the *Iliad's* games, which the *Aeneid* cleans up a little; in the Homeric equivalent to this fall, dung (*onthos*) from the sacrificial animals gets right into the mouth of Ajax, the son of Oileus (*Il.* 23.781), who takes it as evidence of Athena's affection for Odysseus; Nisus falls headlong in a mixture of dirt and blood, but the emphasis is more on the slip than on the filth. This issue of decorum may explain why (unlike Athenian tragedies) the *Aeneid* rarely comments explicitly on smell as one of the senses through which characters perceive material forms of pollution.

8. The Iliadic intertexts are unusually pressing in this scene, partly because the *Aeneid* here comes closer than usual to borrowing Homeric cultural and poetic norms surrounding gifts and prizes as an expression of value and a means of communicating *kleos*. Nisus' experience recalls Antilochus' foul of Menelaus in *Iliad* 23's chariot race as well as Oilean Ajax's fall in sacrificial dung and blood (it is a pity that Latin and Greek do not seem to share the English pollution metaphor of a "foul" for athletic violations). But there are some key differences from the Homeric competitions whose memory blends with the *Aeneid's* footrace: the most striking changes are the outcome of the dispute over prizes and the lack of divine intervention. In the *Iliad*, Menelaus and Antilochus resolve their own problem, as Antilochus admits that Menelaus' horses were faster and presents him with the prize mare awarded by Achilles, which Menelaus in turn gives to Antilochus. Their redistribution of the prizes becomes an opportunity for the participants to show their generosity alongside Achilles,

solves the problem by finding more gifts for both those who have fallen. The playful wrangling over prizes emphasizes the arbitrariness of the rewards given to the runners. The fact that the prizes exceed or bypass their recipients' achievements measures the generosity of Aeneas, who must cement his authority as Trojan *pater*, now that he no longer shares his position as leader with either Anchises or Dido. His arbitrariness expresses in material terms the boundlessness of the *pietas* that celebrates the memory of his own father. But above all, at this point in the poem it becomes a means of eliminating the figurative and actual muck that has sullied the race.

In Book 9, after we are reintroduced to Nisus and Euryalus, the young men's *ardor* is presented from the outset as a problem of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Their story begins with Nisus' famous question: *dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, / Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?* ("Is it gods who give our minds this burning feeling, Euryalus, or does each person's own terrible desire become a god in his eyes?" 9.184–85).<sup>10</sup> Nisus here asks one of the great questions of the epic imagination. As so often, the "either/or" question can be rephrased with a "both/and" answer: an epic's divine framework is both a figurative permutation of human energy and a way to convey how the human imagination reaches beyond the limits of its understanding.<sup>11</sup> When Nisus diagnoses his own urge as *dira cupido*, he echoes the Sibyl's rebuke to Palinurus (6.373), which was in turn an intensification of the way she characterized Aeneas' desire to seek knowledge in the underworld (merely *tanta cupido* in 6.133). Nisus implies both that the desire itself is transgressive ("strange," "terrible" — perhaps even "foul"), and that this transgressive quality is precisely what makes it tempting to attribute divine authority to the urge.

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whereas in Sicily Aeneas alone acts as donor. Equally striking is the absence of Athena, who fouts Ajax to grant Odysseus victory in the Iliadic footrace. The poetic logic of making Euryalus' success an entirely human outcome works on many levels (he is no Odysseus, and in *Aeneid* 5 the role of prayer is instead highlighted in the boat race) but also looks forward to the explicit absence of the gods from the narrative of Nisus and Euryalus in Book 9.

9. Nisus raises the question of whether humans artificially drive themselves past impassable boundaries by claiming divine influence and divine authority, not so much rationalizing their emotions as externalizing them. Nisus' question points to the kind of imaginative rationalization for which Seneca will a few decades later have her nurse attack Phaedra (*Phaedra* 195–97): the externalization of an emotional drive (in particular *cupido*) as divine intervention. On the other hand, for a careful account of specifically Stoic views of the complex relations between impulse, reasoned knowledge, and moral responsibility, see Graver 2007, especially chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

10. For further discussion of the implications of *dira cupido* (including its parallels in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* Book 4), see Fowler 2000a, 96–97.

11. Lyne 1987, 66–67 calls Nisus' question "over-simple" as it presents the problem "in unreal 'either/or' terms"; as Lyne points out, "when the gods are observable, what happens is a blend of the two alternatives."

The subtlety with which divine agents such as Cupid and Allecto are able to blend their effects into human experience makes Nisus' question a meaningful one for the poem's readers. The energy prompting the sortie is depicted in the language of human desire, but the vocabulary of *ardor* and *cupido* links Nisus and his passions with characters such as Dido (especially 1.695, 4.101) and Turnus (9.760–61), whose emotions, perceptions, and choices are presented explicitly to readers as motivated by gods.<sup>12</sup> The whole episode emphasizes Nisus' restless mind as much as the deeds themselves. The poem connects this restlessness with the uncertainties caused by the limited reach of human perception in a story world filled with imperceptible divine forces.

The transgressive quality that Nisus identifies at the start becomes realized throughout the episode. Its excesses heighten the problems of making tangible the imaginative and commemorative urges that the Trojans experience. In military terms, the main objective is to get information past the Rutulian lines to the absent Aeneas. But Nisus conceives the endeavor less as a solution to the problem facing the besieged Trojans than as an outlet for his feelings and imagination: *aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum inuadere magnum / mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est* ("to launch either a fight, or something big, my mind has for a while past been driving me, and it's not satisfied with calm repose," 9.186–87).<sup>13</sup> The thought has its own volition as it springs up in him (*percipe* [ . . . ] *quae nunc animo sententia surgat*), and he describes the anticipated result with the verb *uideor*, which hovers between a simple supposition ("I suppose that I can . . .") and a visualization ("I seem to . . ."): *tumulo uideor reperire sub illo / posse uiam ad muros et moenia Pallantea* ("under that hill I see myself being able to track down the path towards the walls and city of Pallanteum," 9.195–96).

Nisus justifies the plan inspired by his transgressive desire in terms of its story-generating potential and as a tangible expression of his love for Euryalus. He attaches a proviso when he outlines his intent to Euryalus: "if they promise you what I demand (since the *fama* of the deed is enough for me)" (*si tibi quae posco promittunt [nam mihi facti / fama sat est]*, 9.194–95). And although Nisus wishes to keep Euryalus safe and to use his own solitary

12. The lack of explicit intervention from the gods is generally attributed to the fact that Nisus and Euryalus exist on a different fictional plane from the legendary characters that dominate the poem. Their story seems to be ungrounded in the kind of tradition that anchors the genre's claim to a form of immortal knowledge passed down through the human memory of successive generations.

13. See especially Fowler 2000a, 98: "Nisus feels inspired to launch himself on something great just as a poet—or the poet—is inspired to begin an epic, the genre whose watchword is *magnum* ('big') and whose subject is pre-eminently *pugnae* ('fights')."



achievement to celebrate him, Euryalus' imitative desire to purchase *honorem* with his life (9.206) is in keeping with Nisus' original aim of glorifying his beloved. For Nisus, the significance of the envisaged mission stems equally from its ability to produce his own *fama* and to denote materially the value he sets on his beloved Euryalus.

These are both aspects of the same commemorative aspiration. The Trojan elder Aletes makes a similar distinction to Nisus'; he tries to measure the worth of the young men's courage with tangible *praemia*, but he declares that the finest rewards will be given by the gods and by their own characters (*pulcherrima primum / di moresque dabunt uestri*, 9.253–54). Both Nisus and Aletes closely link the evaluative function of the material gifts with less tangible aesthetic rewards. But Aletes then backtracks somewhat, to add that Aeneas, *pius* as he is, will indeed make good on whatever rewards are not god-given, and Ascanius, too: *tum cetera reddet / actutum pius Aeneas atque integer aevi / Ascanius meriti tanti non immemor umquam* (9.254–56). In this formulation, Ascanius' unending remembrance of the pair's worth directly matches his father's *pietas*. The gifts which Ascanius then begins lavishly to promise (9.263ff.) are designed by him to embody the meaning of Nisus and Euryalus' projected task. Yet his climactic offering is not a thing, but a promise of filial care for Euryalus' mother, for whom Euryalus requests help and consolation once he is gone. With this gift alone is it possible to mirror the tie of parent and child that gives the message-taking from Ascanius to Aeneas the special significance allotted it by the Trojans.<sup>14</sup> Even the posited communicative function of the sortie expresses emotion of this kind; it enacts *pietas* and measures Aeneas' value (9.261–62) as much it serves a strictly military end.

Ascanius clearly hopes that itemizing lavish riches will depict materially the value of the mission, but the list instead alters the nature of that mission. One obvious Iliadic predecessor to this list, Agamemnon's offerings to Achilles, dwells most specifically on objects that have been taken through Achilles' own achievements: the gifts serve to commemorate his past as well as to set a particular value on the role that Agamemnon expects him to play in the future.<sup>15</sup> Ascanius' list, by contrast, perversely memorializes the future, extending Aletes' characterization of Ascanius as *meriti tanti non immemor*

14. The narrative brings home this point by telling how Iulus, described as a kind of mirror image of Euryalus (*pulcher* as he is), sees the resemblance to his *pietas* towards his father, and to his father's own *pietas* (9.293–94).

15. And in *Iliad* 10, the most obvious intertext for this episode, Dolon's hoped-for prize is directly connected with the task at hand.

*umquam* (9.256, “never heedless of such worth”). The gifts bring their own complex set of evocations: they connect the Trojans’ past experiences with their future hopes, but have little to do with the original aims of Nisus and Euryalus. We are invited to imagine Ascanius’ careful list of gifts as an attempt to replicate what *pater* Aeneas achieves in Book 5 when he steps fully into the paternal role left empty by Anchises’ death. Here in Book 9 Ascanius tries both to communicate with his father and to stand in for him. Aeneas’ sometimes arbitrary generosity provides a flood of cleansing *pietas*. He tidies up the messiness of the athletic struggles through rewards that would reshape the memory of the contests, much as the contests themselves give a new direction to memories of Anchises in Book 5. But in Book 9, Ascanius does not seem to understand that he cannot clean up the filth of war by emulating his father’s gift giving.

Here the pictured rewards, though grandiose, turn out not to be arbitrary at all: they actively shift the direction of subsequent events, as past, present, and future are brought together in the list of objects Ascanius imagines giving. Nisus has already subtly shifted the emphasis of the mission in promising that they will be seen again soon *cum spoliis ingenti caede peracta* (“with spoils and after dealing tremendous slaughter,” 9.242). Ascanius looks to the past for gifts that recall Aeneas’ past conquests (9.264) and Dido’s hospitality (9.265–66). He then turns to the future, imagining the conquest of Italy, and focusing on Turnus’ horse and its splendid trappings: *iam nunc tua praemia, Nise* (“already your rewards, Nisus,” 9.271). He extends his ambitious generosity to Latinus’ lands.

When Ascanius eyes the possessions of Turnus and Latinus, he turns the venture from a message-taking expedition into one of conquest. The Trojans’ attempt to order the *fama* of the sortie by making its worth known in material terms has the effect of producing a recursive cycle of transformed matter and metaphor. Abstract value is translated into material objects, which are themselves remembered or imagined; these have a figurative significance that exceeds the meaning initially intended for them by Ascanius and the other Trojans. That excess of imaginative significance becomes materially realized in the subsequent wild killings of Rutulians by Nisus and Euryalus, which the *Aeneid*’s narrative both imagines and commemorates. This bloody realization of excess on the part of Nisus and Euryalus then inspires further reciprocal violence, which likewise works as a material form of communication. The Rutulians avenge and commemorate their comrades’ deaths, not only killing but also defiling the bodies of the killers, Nisus and Euryalus, and displaying their disfigured heads.

## 5.2 Dirty fighting

The instability of Nisus and Euryalus' story continues as they begin to murder sleeping Rutulians; the fluid interaction between materiality and metaphor becomes extended in the narrative imagery through which readers experience the attack. Both Nisus and Euryalus unleash a frenzy that becomes a polluted extension of the unidentifiable imaginative longing (*ardor*) that led Nisus to propose the undertaking. As a bridge between Nisus' killings and the madness of Euryalus, the poem likens the fighter to a lion, who chews on sheep, and, like *Furor* itself, roars from a mouth smeared with blood (*fremit ore cruento*, 9.341).<sup>16</sup> As Hardie notes, "the simile is Janus headed."<sup>17</sup> At first it seems to sum up Nisus' violence, but the narrative goes on to compare the Nisus-lion's actions with the slaughter done by Euryalus (*nec minor Euryali caedes*, 9.342). Euryalus is on fire, mad (9.342–43).

As so often in epic, the simile suggests that readers can best grasp *fama*-worthy extremes through category-confusing verbal transformations, which express the bestiality of such violence. While each of these comparisons retains its power to shock, they are frequent enough in epic to constitute a strand of the genre's characteristic normative excess. Tales of battle do not usually explore the possibility that the gore and filth of violence in battle may bring ritual pollution: such fears rarely become overt unless there is a crisis over burial, or if blood-stained fighters handle (or must expressly avoid handling) sacred objects.<sup>18</sup>

More often the threat of pollution is submerged into the perceptual transgression experienced by readers. We see men figuratively metamorphosed into lions or wolves, and are asked to imagine in material terms the fighters' mental and moral departure from humanity. Though Neptune has prevented the *pii* Trojans from being made into animals by Circe's magic

16. See Putnam 1965, 52 on the repetition of *fremit ore cruento* from the description of *impius Furor* in Book 1, and its appearance again in Book 12 when Turnus too becomes a lion. Putnam also points out that the decapitation of Remus, with its echoes of Priam and its foreshadowing of what will happen to Nisus and Euryalus themselves, is among the most vividly described of the pair's excesses (9.332–34).

17. Hardie 1994 on 9.342 points to Catullus 68 (in which similes, metaphors, and narrative are fabulously piled up and merged) as a precedent for this kind of two-headed comparison.

18. Turnus' purification in the river Tiber in 9.815–18 provides an interesting exception to this pattern, foreshadowing the self-contained—but this time unwilling—escape of Turnus by water after Juno lures him away from battle with her illusory Aeneas in Book 10. As Putnam 1965, 62 points out, Turnus' escape from the Trojans' fortified encampment contrasts with the experiences of Nisus and Euryalus earlier in Book 9, which in other ways parallel what happens to Turnus. The Tiber welcomes Turnus and sends him back on its soft waves to his comrades, *abluta caede* ("after washing away the slaughter," 9.818).

(7.15–24), the poet’s voice does not let them off so easily.<sup>19</sup> In 9.328 the narrative of one of the briefly individualized deaths recalls the purificatory expiation that augurs assist in when a community attempts to end or prevent a plague: Rhamnetes cannot ward off destruction with augury (*sed non augurio potuit depellere pestem*). Using the word *pestis* to describe the augur’s death at the hands of Nisus hints at the pollution incurred by this kind of slaughter.<sup>20</sup>

In the great send-off, spoils had been an indicator of due remembrance (*Ascanius meriti tanti non immemor umquam*, 9.256) and of epic’s ability to unite many temporal dimensions. But in the midst of his madness, caught in the present tense of his *cupido*, Euryalus becomes *immemor* (9.374)—heedless of how the objects he has taken may communicate against his will by gleaming in the night’s glow. Nisus tries to recall the pair to their communicative mission. It is too late—Euryalus is being swept away by an excess of killing and desire (*nimia caede atque cupidine*, 9.354), a telling hendiadys.<sup>21</sup> Euryalus prefigures Turnus’ end by drawing destruction upon himself with his shining spoils. From this point on, the only way to recapture the *fama* sought is in the beauty of death. Once Euryalus has been captured, Nisus realizes that a rescue attempt is unlikely to succeed, and envisages hurrying upon a *mors pulchra* (9.401), which will match Euryalus’ beauty (9.179, 433) as well as his death.

The narrative then emulates this imitative desire. Nisus does not let his gaze linger on Euryalus’ death; instead he immediately seeks to match it (9.437, *at Nisus ruit*), and dies in killing the man who has killed Euryalus.<sup>22</sup> The poem does look at Euryalus, but also, in a sense, turns its gaze away as it reimagines the scene with a transformative simile:

uoluitur Euryalus leto, pulchrosque per artus  
 it cruor inque umeros ceruix conlapsa recumbit:  
 purpureus ueluti cum flos succisus aratro  
 languescit moriens, lassoue papauera collo  
 demisere caput pluuiam cum forte grauantur.

19. Putnam 1995, 104–12 emphasizes how far Circe’s role reaches into Book 7 and beyond, and observes the Circean characteristics of the metamorphic power that Juno enacts through Allecto’s *furor*.

20. *Pestis* (“plague”) is often a term for “death” in general, but the context highlights the implication of pollution here. Cf. Lennon 2010, 431ff. on Cicero’s use of *pestis* to refer to Catiline and Clodius.

21. The phrase works both as hendiadys and as a full pairing: “desire for slaughter” or “slaughter and desire.”

22. Reed 2007, 28 carefully discusses the question of whose gaze creates the poppy simile.

Euryalus is submerged in death, and along his beautiful limbs runs gore, and his neck rests, slipping on his shoulders: as when a crimson flower cut down by the plough fades as it dies, or poppies with wearied neck have let drop their heads when by chance they are weighed down by the rain. (*Aen.* 9.433–37)

The description admits *cruor* (9.434), before cleaning away the gore by comparing the death to unplanned, chance brutalities inflicted on flowers. Poppies neither bleed nor mete out bloody deaths to others.<sup>23</sup> This cleansing vision is undercut, however, by the grotesque allusiveness of Euryalus' prophetic name, which he shares with the boxer who ends up spitting blood and letting his head loll (poppy-like?) in *Iliad* 23.697–99.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the narrative swiftly returns to the gore that the flower imagery had partly washed away, though only after the poet's famous apostrophe and (conditional) pledge to prevent the two being erased from Roman memory: *Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt, / nulla dies unquam memori uos eximet aeuo, / dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum / accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit* ("Fortunate, both of you! If my songs have any power, no day will ever drive you from time's memory, while the home of Aeneas keeps its place by the Capitol's motionless rock and while the Roman father holds command," 9.446–49). Long-lived—or perhaps immortal—Roman power is here expressed in an ambiguous formulation, which hovers between a political configuration on the human level and a mythical depiction of divine control. Immediately after the apostrophe, we are directed to another form of commemoration, when a grim recognition scene takes place among the Rutulians. The group of men who had

23. Imagery associating blood, poppies, and fragmented bodies has a special resonance for the generations since World War I, above all in communities that display and renew memories of the armistice and the war's sufferings by wearing poppies made of paper or cloth. "Poppy day" reenacts each winter the blooming of summer flowers, which brought new life to the defiled fields of Flanders and France, with their broken bodies and broken land. The structure of the Vergilian flower simile, however, as it first presents a crimson flower cut down by a plough, then poppies weighed down by rain, emphasizes the disjointed fragility of the damaged flowers and boy, as much as the color of the flowing *cruor*.

24. See also Johnson 1976, 59–62 on the conspicuous artificiality of the flower simile, with its Homeric and Catullan intertexts; "these verses," he suggests, are "in a certain way [. . .] too beautiful even for the climax of the dreamlike adventures of Euryalus and Nisus; they want almost to be excerpted from their surroundings, to be pondered over, repeated" (61). Johnson refers to the Nisus and Euryalus episode as the Vergilian *Doloneia*: the response of some ancient (and indeed modern) critics to the primary *Doloneia* of *Iliad* 10 inverts, in a sense, the temptation to excerpt described by Johnson. One way to clean up the polluting presence of Dolon's story in the Homeric narrative is to discard it as inauthentic.

happened upon Euryalus in the forest, while they mourn the leader whom Nisus has killed, take the bodies and the spoil to the Rutulian encampment; both groups of Rutulians then piece together what has happened when they throng towards “the place fresh with still-warm slaughter,” and find “streams foaming with blood,” as in the Sibyl’s fearsome predictions (9.456; 6.87).<sup>25</sup>

In the eyes of the Rutulians, the contaminating filth of war expresses the horror of what has been done to their friends by Nisus and Euryalus before the young Trojans were themselves killed. To add to the copious traces of spilled blood, shared narratives give the Rutulians new energy for fighting (“they sharpen their battle-wrath with varied rumors,” *uariisque acuunt rumoribus iras*, 9.464), and they turn their mourning into imitative revenge. They mimic the dismembering foulness of the previous night’s slaughter by fixing the heads of Nisus and Euryalus on spears; they follow these like standards (*quin ipsa arrectis [uisu miserabile] in hastis / praefigunt capita et multo clamore sequuntur / Euryali et Nisi*, 9.465–67).

But as the poem tells of the Rutulians’ anger, even before it has fully revealed how their emotion is horribly rematerialized in this symbolic revenge on the dead Trojans, the narrative begins to turn its attention to the surviving older Trojans who will have to confront the sight, warning, “pitiable to look at!” (*uisu miserabile*). For those well-toughened followers of Aeneas (*Aeneadae duri*, 9.468), the faces of Nisus and Euryalus are all too recognizable (*nota nimis*), even when they are oozing with decay (*atroque fluentia tabo*, 9.472).

Euryalus’ mother, however, sees her son’s decaying face as a kind of riddle. He is changed almost beyond recognition by the visible signs of death pollution and by the experiences that have taken his body out of her reach. The poem asked us to see in the dead Euryalus a flower cut down by the plough, or a poppy brought down by heavy rain. Now the dead are

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25. When observing how the *Aeneid* oscillates between filth and beautified glory in its treatment of killing, one becomes especially aware that (as James Tatum reminds us) “until barriers of technology are breached, so that we at last can smell and feel as well as hear and see what happens to human bodies in war, we cannot imagine what people have to endure” (2003, 132). Tatum connects the sensory ignorance of noncombatants with the gradual numbing of both physical and moral sensitivity that so often occurs for those in the midst of the horrors, which he explores in E. B. Sledge’s memoir of his experiences in the Pacific during World War II (*With the Old Breed*). The conclusion of this chapter in Tatum’s *The Mourner’s Song* is worth quoting at length here: “Sledge was outraged by the mutilation and dishonor meted out to his fellow soldiers, and to begin with he was capable of as much disgust at his fellow marines’ similar treatment of the enemy. But by the time his memoir nears its end, in the trench warfare of Okinawa, it is only his own comrades’ deaths that move him; dead Japanese did not bother him ‘in the least.’ Then he too was finally caught in the Yes and No of war, the contradictions that are as impossible for us to untangle as the feelings we have about Achilles strumming away on the lyre from Eëtion’s city” (2003, 134–35).

transformed again, as we are urgently made aware that perceiving youthful warriors as flowers is only one way of remembering them (though the poem will offer another such analogy for the dead Pallas in 11.68–71). Another kind of commemoration is possible, one that distrusts such beautifying discourse. Euryalus' mother does not see her son as retaining his looks in the figurative loveliness of immortal *fama*. Instead she asks, *hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio?* ("Is this you, Euryalus, that I see?" 9.481).<sup>26</sup>

Her questions give the story a new figurative turn, partly through the echoes of tragedy that reverberate in this episode as in so much of the poem. Oliensis observes how Euryalus becomes a dismembered Pentheus, with a difference: here recognition becomes difficult for the mother, not because of Dionysiac possession, but because her alienation from her son's body alienates her simultaneously from conventional ways of seeing.<sup>27</sup> The logic of the Euripidean recognition scene is inverted. Recovering from her possession by Dionysus allows Euripides' Agaue to recognize the head she holds as something more familiar than the lion that her maddened imagination had seen as a hunting trophy. The *Aeneid's* narrative instead presents increasing disorientation. There is none of Agaue's gradually dawning sanity. Readers, too, are implicated in this metamorphic disorientation, because the poet has earlier given us a vision like Agaue's, when first Nisus and then in turn Euryalus became a lion in 9.339–42.

Nisus finds in death the "calm repose" that he had previously rejected, and for which the unburied Palinurus yearns in Book 6.<sup>28</sup> Sophocles provides further tragic intertexts in this episode. Fowler has noted that Nisus' *Liebestod* recalls the death-marriage of Sophocles' Antigone and Haimon (*Antigone* 1238–40).<sup>29</sup> But the simultaneous death of Nisus and Volcens (the Rutulian leader) also recalls Polynices and Eteocles.<sup>30</sup> When Euryalus' mother sees her dead son's face, detached from the rest of him, she imagines his inaccessible body lying as spoil for dogs and birds. This is hardly a novel complaint for an epic lament, but here it evokes Sophocles' *Antigone* again,

26. And in this sense, of course, she is rejecting a metaphorical transformation that has deep roots in the epic (and lyric) tradition; see especially *Iliad* 8.306–8.

27. Oliensis 2009, 71–72.

28. *tum super exanimus sese proiecit amicum / confossus, placidaque ibi demum morte quieuit*, 9.444–45; cf. 9.186–87: *aut pugnam aut aliquid iam dudum inuadere magnum / mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est*.

29. Fowler 2000a, 97.

30. Allusions to the Theban myth are all the more potent, of course, because the *Aeneid's* Italian war is a proto-civil war for Romans, shadowed by the fratricide to come, when Romulus will kill Remus and provide the paradigm for the intrafamilial killings later to taint Rome's future—these are the patterns that will make Statius' *Thebaid* a Roman epic in every sense, despite its Greek setting.

and the fragmented corpses of Thebes' attackers (in particular Polynices, who has invaded his own too familiar land), which soil the altars of the gods when birds drop them after scavenging the unburied dead. The tragedy makes this ritual pollution the material instantiation and summary of all the other transgressions that have defiled the family of Oedipus. For Euryalus' mother, however, her son's body as matter out of place is all the more widely astray because he lies as spoil for animals in an unknown land—the dogs and birds that will eat him (and scatter him still further) are Latin! (*heu, terra ignota canibus data praeda Latinis / alitibusque iaces!* 9.485–86).

She links the horrifying transformation of Euryalus' body into dirt with this territorial alienation. Her job as mother has lost its meaning: she cannot care for his body in death and wrap him in the cloth she has worked for him. With his face in its barely recognizable state of decay, she associates his body with the unfamiliar territory where it lies. We have already heard that she was the only one of the Trojan mothers to pursue their journey through to this point; most of the women have remained in Sicily in Book 5, after the crisis when Iris fed on their resentment of the unending travels so as to instigate their burning of their own ships.<sup>31</sup> Iris (disguised as the Trojan woman Beroe) had correctly diagnosed the women's frustration that "Italy we pursue—as it runs away" (*Italiam sequimur fugientem*, 5.629). Now Euryalus' mother asks:

'quo sequar? aut quae nunc artus auulsaque membra  
et funus lacerum tellus habet? hoc mihi de te,  
nate, refers? hoc sum terraque marique secuta?'

"Where I will follow? Or what land now holds your joints and torn-off  
limbs  
and mangled death? Is this all you bring me of yourself,  
son?<sup>32</sup> Is *this* what I followed by land and sea?" (*Aen.* 9.490–92)

Instead of pursuing an Italy that flees from her, she reconceives that fated journey as a quest for the shreds of her son. She turns to her dead son for

31. Nisus regards her as unique for her courageous willingness to follow her son in his entire journey; he cites his concern for her potential sorrow as a reason for dissuading Euryalus from sharing his exploit (9.216–18, *neu matri miserae tanti sim causa doloris, / quae te sola, puer, multis e matribus ausa / persequitur, magni nec moenia curat Aestae*).

32. Or "Is this the news you bring me about yourself, son?" The ambiguity of the Latin allows her question to refer simultaneously to the disfigured head as *hoc*, all that Euryalus has left of himself for his mother, and to the news that this head brings her of his end.



guidance as if he were a riddling oracle, like the oracles questioned by Aeneas during their seven years of wandering.

The only recourse left for maternal *pietas* is for her, too, to emulate her son's death. But instead of following Euryalus, she doubles Nisus, for the second time, demanding of her enemies imitative *pietas* that will replicate Euryalus' death so as to match her own sorrow: *figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela / conicite, o Rutuli, me primam absumite ferro* ("Pierce me, if there is any sense of reverence, against me hurl all your weapons, Rutulians, me first destroy with your blade," 9.493–94).<sup>33</sup> Her plea for death uses many of Nisus' words (as well as echoing Aeneas' prayer in 5.687–92). 9.493–94 come close to repeating 427–28, just as her questions about the location of his corpse in 490–91 repeat the bewilderment that Nisus expressed a hundred lines earlier, when he asked, *qua te regione reliqui? / quae sequar?* ("in what quarter did I abandon you? or where am I to follow?").

The *fama* to which Nisus had aspired (9.195) has become the news-bringing *fama* (*nuntia fama*, 9.474) that slips into the ears of Euryalus' mother. Her lament participates in the poem's acts of remembrance, but she threatens to paralyze the forward movement of the epic, as the men's strength for battle is broken (9.499–500). Her speech is incendiary, threatening to continue the work of the companions she left in Sicily, so she is bundled away before she can set alight more powerful emotions. While in Book 5 Ascanius was told that "the ships were ablaze" (*incensas [ . . . ] nauis*, 5.665) because of the Trojan women's madness, here the Trojan men grab the mother on the command of Ilioneus and Ascanius "as she sets ablaze grief" (*incendentem luctus*, 9.500).

Euryalus' mother (who is unnamed except in terms of that relationship), reverses the rhetoric predominating in the connections between topography and ritual earlier in the poem, where varied uses of *sedes* linked "home" with "final resting place." We can no longer rely on the logic by which excessive grief embeds Misenus, Palinurus, and Caieta all the more firmly in the Italian landscape through the commemoration granted by their names.<sup>34</sup> In Book 3 Polydorus' body became one with the land where his murdered corpse is placed, and drove the Trojans from Thrace. Now, in Book 9, Eury-

33. Hardie 1994 *ad loc.* suggests that the primary sense of *pietas* here is "human pity," and links the inversion of core values here with the more extreme form that such inversion takes in Lucan's epic.

34. Euryalus' mother is remembered only in terms of other names—the "wide sea" of her son, or Ascanius' mother Creusa, who was lost at Troy; Ascanius has promised Euryalus that she will become his own mother, lacking only the name Creusa (*namque erit ista mihi genetrix nomenque Creusae / solum defuerit*, 9.297–98).

alus' body *is* Italy for his mother, but is still out of reach, just as the land had been during those seemingly interminable years of wandering.

Though the narrative refers to the mother as out of her mind with grief (*amens*, 9.478), the poem leaves open the question of which of these competing visions of the dead may be saner: the brief metamorphosis, which removes the stains of war by turning Euryalus' corpse into an image of inhuman beauty? The defiling of the bodies as the Rutulians replicate the violent deaths they mourn? The stern neutrality of the hardened Trojans, who are silently moved and try to contain the force of emotion? Or the mother's agonized riddles?

At any rate, the poem allows the mother to close Nisus and Euryalus' story, so that her words become the final round in a series of transformations in which *pietas* operates through the complex—and at times unharnessed—rhetoric of imaginative substitution. In her wild lament, she expresses her inability to complete the series of exchanges required by *pietas*. Instead she imagines herself gradually extending the recognition of her son's estranged body, to work out in the most horrifying material sense what goes with what, piecing together for proper mourning and burial the missing corpse, which she envisages as scattered in unknown lands.

The *Aeneid* regularly shows rumors flying and grief unmoored among both men and women, equally effective in providing poetic energy. But women's pain is more often depicted in its raw harshness, because the ideological means to channel the excess of their suffering into a celebration and commemoration of *uirtus* ("manliness" or simply "excellence") are not readily available.<sup>35</sup> Georgia Nugent has elegantly articulated this difference: "The men seem capable of performing a marvelous alchemy that transmutes the seemingly senseless pain endured and inflicted for an elusive future goal into the fine stuff of heroism and civic virtue."<sup>36</sup> As Nugent points out, "women possess no such philosopher's stone. Rather than absorbing and somehow transforming pain, the women of the *Aeneid* very often simply reflect it back into the community." The *Aeneid* repeatedly puts forward oppositions, contrasts, and conflicts marked by gender, and with almost equal consistency undoes its own work in establishing gender-based polarities.<sup>37</sup> But the principal norms established for excellence in Roman thought

35. See again Tatum 1984 on the intertextual work performed by Sophocles' *Ajax* in the Dido narrative. *Fama* and its Greek equivalents propel madness and suicide for both, but in Sophocles' tragedy Odysseus is able to make the subsequent mourning rituals into a means of re-establishing some kind of social cohesion, whereas grief for Dido in Carthage makes her madness infect her city.

36. Nugent 1999, 253. See Nugent 1992 for a sensitive reading of the lament scene in Book 5.

37. See, for example, Paul Allen Miller 1989, 58 on the "ambiguous nature of the feminine, implying both the order of continuity and the disorder of passion."

are not overturned. By the end of Book 12, Turnus values *virtus* and his reputation higher than life, and begs Aeneas not for survival but for a proper burial, while his previously human sister Juturna—an immortal with the perceptions of a woman—finds nothing but pain in the thought that she must live forever with her grief.

In the Nisus and Euryalus episode, this difference is voiced through the layering of remembrance offered by the poem for the dead lovers. The poet's voice briefly takes over the potentially purifying work of mourning, but the mother then gives utterance to the inadequacy of that poetic cleansing. If some collective memory is established within this story world or by the poetic narrative, it is neither monolithic nor stable. The poem suggests that reifying *fama* would not diminish its mutability.

The conflict within Book 9's narrative over how to remember the dead crystallizes the difficulties of trying to align ritual and geopolitical order by putting matter in its place. These difficulties are heightened by Allecto's contaminating madness in Book 7, but (as we saw in chapter 3) they are not wholly attributable to Juno's unleashing the forces of Tartarus in the world of the living. Even with the expert Sibyl presiding over the handling of life and death, *fas* and *nefas*, Book 6 has already shown that *pietas* may heighten more than it settles underlying problems in ascertaining what might constitute "order."

The episode imagines the creative force of a series of transactions. Unformed desire is exchanged for decisive action; promised gifts of imagined plunder serve for moral evaluation; immediate killings and spoils stand in for more distant strategic benefit; the death and disfigurement of the killers provide some recompense for the slaughter they have carried out. Epic's commemorative discourse not only acknowledges material dirt but also exacerbates problems of pollution by heightening conceptual ruptures in the ritual economy of *pietas*. Ambivalence about the interaction between *pietas* and *fama* sharpens the contrast between characters who long to see and touch *fama*, transmuted into something recognizable as a substance (gifts or spoil), and those who are brutally confronted with its materiality in the filth of death.

The madness within the story world becomes part of the *fama* generated by the narrative. The work of metaphor, with its ability both to evoke materiality and to offer a substitute for it, gives readers the opportunity to share both the excesses and the limitations of the perceptual blending experienced by the epic's characters. Actions and events have repeatedly been reshaped into heightened imaginative forms. These are then equally steadily beaten back into a painfully inadequate—yet still inaccessible—materiality.