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Nisus and Euryalus and their Pals

Analyses of the Nisus and Euryalus episode in book nine of Virgils *Aeneid* are not in short supply. Despite the variety of interpretations, there is a general consensus that Virgils depiction of the relationship between the two Trojans coheres with other traditional versions of dyadic friendship. Philip Hardie notes in his commentary, for example, that the two fall into an ageold pattern of the two closely knit friends who fight or go on adventures together, often in a shared exploration of the limits and possibilities of the male world of courage and violence (Hardie 1994, 32). The comparison is valid. The relationship between Nisus and Euryalus parallels other narratives in that it consists of two male, young, brave, beautiful warriors and finds its proving ground in an agonistic setting. Yet what remain neglected are the questions of how and why Virgils account of the friendship between Nisus and Euryalus *differs* from other representations of dyadic friendship. By utilizing the comparative approach David Halperin employs in his analysis of heroic friendship (Halperin, 1990), the first portion of this paper illustrates how in key features Virgils portrayal of the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus departs from those of other dyads such as Achilles and Patroclus and Gilgamesh and Enkidu. In traditional narratives the two friends form a segregated couple and remain separated from larger social groups. In book nine of the *Aeneid*, however, Nisus and Euryalus are repeatedly integrated within the corporate body. Thus Aletes links the actions and bravery of the two with the survival of the Trojan community (9.24650). Virgils closing *makarismos* (9.4469) likewise situates the entire episode within the context of Roman *imperium*. Again unlike other traditional models, Virgil does not always prioritize the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus or marginalize their bonds with others. Euryalus mother, for example, becomes a source of concern for both Euryalus (9.283292) and Nisus (9.216218). Similarly, Ascanius acceptance of Euryalus as a comrade just prior to the night mission and his recognition of a bond of *fides* between them (9.275280) suggests a dissolution of the circumscribed limits of friendship common in other narratives. Another common component of versions of male friendship is the assumption of the terms or roles of conjugality and kinship. In the Virgilian episode, however, this feature is notably absent. Yet although kinship roles do not structure the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus, the episode highlights the extension of family bonds beyond the dyad. Thus Ascanius assuages Euryalus concerns for his mother by insisting that she will now become a mother to him (*namque erit ista mihi genetrix nomenque Creusae | solum defuerit*, 9.297298). Finally, accounts of dyadic friendships are often alike in that they depict the death of one friend accompanied by the overwhelming grief of the survivor. But in book nine Nisus and Euryalus die almost simultaneously, and responsibility for mourning is consequently transferred to the Trojan community (9.46872, 49899) and Euryalus mother (9.481489).

The major differences between the Nisus and Euryalus episode and other accounts of dyadic friendship thus established, the latter portion of this paper turns to offering an explanation for such changes. Here the discussion proceeds in two parts. First of all, it is suggested that the modifications Virgil introduces all point to a greater concern with corporate identity and the expansion of individual loyalties. Second, this change in values

as represented in the episode is traced to the demands of shifting cultural paradigms. The reasons for Virgils manipulation of the patterns of dyadic friendship, in other words, are to be found in the fact that the episode no longer wholly embodies the codes of, for example, Greek heroic epic, but rather their application to a new Roman setting. The specific changes Virgil makes, furthermore, are reflective of contemporary cultural context. In *De amicitia* and *De officiis*, for example, Cicero frequently explores and redefines the bonds between friends, state, and family. Similarly, Andrew Feldherr (1997) has demonstrated how Livys account of the end of the monarchy and beginning of the republic foregrounds the expansion of individual loyalties. Many of these same currents, I argue, underpin the Virgilian version of dyadic friendship.