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### Homer, Pietas, and the Cycle of Duels in Aeneid 10 and 12

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# Approaches to Teaching Vergil's *Aeneid*

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Edited by

*William S. Anderson*

and

*Lorina N. Quattarone*

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# CONTENTS

<b>Preface to the Series</b>	ix
<b>Preface to the Volume</b>	xi
<b>PART ONE: MATERIALS</b> <i>Lorina N. Quartarone</i>	
Texts	
Latin Editions and Commentaries	3
English Translations	4
History of the Text	10
The Instructor's Library	
Reference Works	12
Background Studies	13
Critical Studies	14
Periodicals	21
Twentieth-Century Critical Perspectives <i>Daniel M. Hooley</i>	22
Internet Resources	31
Audiovisual Materials	32
<b>PART TWO: APPROACHES</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	37
<i>William S. Anderson and Lorina N. Quartarone</i>	
<b>Preliminary Considerations</b>	
<i>Pietas and Furor: Motivational Forces in the Aeneid</i>	46
<i>Sarah Spence</i>	
Trojan, Dardanian, Roman: The Power of Epithets in the <i>Aeneid</i>	53
<i>William S. Anderson</i>	
<b>Aeneas and Heroism</b>	
"Frigid Indifference" or "Soaked Through and Through with Feeling"? Portrayal of Character in the <i>Aeneid</i>	60
<i>Shirley Werner</i>	
The Public and Private Aeneas: Observations on Complex Responsibility	69
<i>John Breuker, Jr.</i>	
"Turn Pectore Sensus Vertuntur Varii": Reading and Teaching the End of the <i>Aeneid</i>	80
<i>Barbara Weiden Boyd</i>	

**Homeric Intertextuality**

- Vergil's Aeneas: The Best of the Romans 87  
*James J. Clauss*
- Homer, *Pietas*, and the Cycle of Duels in *Aeneid* 10 and 12 99  
*Randall Colaizzi*

**History and Material Culture**

- Vergil's *Aeneid* and the Evolution of Augustus 114  
*Michael C. J. Putnam*
- The Anger of Juno in Vergil's *Aeneid* 123  
*Patricia A. Johnston*
- Vergil and the Monuments 131  
*Mary Jaeger*

**Gender Issues**

- Future Perfect Feminine: Women Past and Present in  
Vergil's *Aeneid* 138  
*Sharon L. James*
- Pietas*, *Furor*, and Ecofeminism in the *Aeneid* 147  
*Lorina N. Quartarone*
- Feminae Furentes*: The Frenzy of Noble Women in Vergil's *Aeneid*  
and the Letter of Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi 159  
*Judith P. Hallett*

**Classroom Techniques and Strategies**

- Appreciating the Poetry of the *Aeneid* 168  
*Scott Ward and Gary S. Meltzer*
- Look Who's Talking: A Narratological Approach 176  
*Nancy Ciccone*

**Integrating the *Aeneid* into Larger Academic Contexts**

- Tragedy and Vergil's *Aeneid* 182  
*Ann Engar*
- Dante's Vergil 190  
*Rachel Jacoff*
- Teaching the *Aeneid* with Milton's *Paradise Lost* 196  
*Patrick J. Cook*

**Appendixes**

Appendix A: Homeric Parallels 201

Appendix B: Cultural, Historical, and Literary Terminology 225

**Notes on Contributors** 229**Survey Participants** 233**Works Cited** 235**Index** 251

## Homer, *Pietas*, and the Cycle of Duels in *Aeneid* 10 and 12

Randall Colaizzi

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Readers who encounter the *Aeneid* today often face an abridgement meant to fit the demands of a college literature survey: Troy, wanderings, Dido, the Underworld—the exotic Odyssean *Aeneid* of the first six books. The poem's second half, if read at all, might offer only scenes from book 8 (etiology and shield), Nisus and Euryalus from book 9, sometimes Camilla in book 11, Turnus's death at the end of the poem. But since the first cut in such selections usually includes most of the warfare, Vergil's subtlety (and difficulty) can be misunderstood, especially if the poem's close is to be considered. In the combat scenes, in particular a series of duels in *Aeneid* 10 and 12, the poet exchanges Homeric fatalism for Vergilian pathos by constructing scenes that develop the complexities of *pietas*. Vergil begins his poem with a paradox about this exchange:

Tell me the reason, Muse: what was the wound  
to her divinity, so hurting her  
that she, the queen of gods, compelled a man  
remarkable for *goodness* [*pietate*] to endure  
so many crises, meet so many trials?  
Can such resentment hold the minds of gods?  
(Mandelbaum 1.13–18 [emphasis mine]; in Latin 8–13)

And as he begins the second half of his poem, he asks the muse Erato for her help, because, as he says,

[. . .] I shall tell  
of dreadful wars, of men who struggle, tell  
of chieftains goaded to the grave by passion,  
of Tuscan troops and all Hesperia  
in arms. A greater theme is born for me; I try a greater labor.  
(7.50–55; 37–45)

This greater theme and labor of *Aeneid* 7–12 concern not only the difficulty of telling a story less wondrous than the Odyssean spectacle of *Aeneid* 1–6 but also the complications of further adapting a Homeric model.

A chain of three great deaths connects the narrative in the last third of Homer's *Iliad*: Sarpedon, Patroclus, Hector. Homer's line is direct: Sarpedon's death, the pinnacle of Patroclus's *aristeia*, leads to Patroclus's death, the climax of Hector's *aristeia*. Hector's death crowns Achilles's *aristeia* and all the battle scenes of the poem. Each death leads directly to the next; although we may

account for divine interference, the antagonists are nevertheless well-matched and mature fighters. Vergil enlarges the series to six encounters and insists on inequality in his matchups. *Pietas* seemed a straightforward virtue, both to the reader and perhaps to Aeneas himself, in the first half of the poem: carrying Anchises through Troy's conflagration, leading the refugees through seven years of wandering, even abandoning Dido at a divine injunction. It now becomes a much more complicated ideal, not least because of these six pairings in books 10 and 12:

- A. Lausus and Pallas: combat of youths denied by the Fates
- B. Turnus and Pallas: youth versus mature warrior
- C. Aeneas and Mezentius: Mezentius's wounding leads to his son's death
- D. Aeneas and Lausus: youth versus mature warrior
- E. Aeneas and Mezentius: Mezentius's death in avenging his son's death
- F. Aeneas and Turnus: combat of heroes required by the Fates

### ***A. Lausus and Pallas*** **(Mandelbaum 10.602–08; in Latin 433–38)**

The characteristic Vergilian sympathy and the complications of *pietas* compel the poet to present the significant combatants of the poem engaged in overmatched fights. Thus the only equal match in the Vergilian series would have been the one that does not occur. Following Pallas's *aristeia* (501–92; 365–425) and the briefer description of Lausus's deeds (593–98; 426–33), the poet describes Pallas and Lausus:

[ . . . ] both close in their years,  
and both most handsome; both denied by fortune  
return to their homelands. Nevertheless,  
the king of high Olympus did not let  
them duel; soon enough their fates await them,  
each fate beneath another, greater hand. (603–08; 433–38)

Vergil thus makes clear that Jupiter himself favors this imbalance of fate. The Homeric "awareness of mortality, from which none in the *Iliad* is exempt" (Gransden, *Virgil's Iliad* 104) becomes instead a Vergilian problem



of competing obligations when fighter meets fighter. The poet's troubling precision directs the reader's response into unexpected reactions. This device becomes all the more obvious when we recall Aeneas's entry into the warfare of book 10:

Aeneas is the first to attack the Italians and produce an omen of victory by killing Theron (310ff.) [Mand. 10.430-34]. As he continues forward, six more victims of his prowess fall, variously wounded. Vergil describes each killing realistically, but dispassionately, so that we appreciate Aeneas' valor and success without feeling great sympathy for the fallen.  
(Anderson, *Art* 82)

In the ensuing duels, there is no such lovely, sad balance of Pallas and Lausus, and no such plain, heroic glory of Aeneas and Theron.

### ***B. Turnus and Pallas*** ***(Mandelbaum 10.609-702; in Latin 439-509)***

The first actual combat of this series sets up *pietas* as a problematic virtue, which will be examined with increasing complexity in the following five encounters. The poet marks this first example in two ways. First, he comments on Turnus's behavior: "O mind of man that does not know the end / or further fates, nor how to keep the measure / when we are fat with pride at things that prosper!" (690-92; 501-02). Second, he separates this duel from the other major ones with a long series of lesser encounters. This duel makes a clear contrast with the match between Pallas and Lausus that never takes place. Turnus's sister urges Turnus to attack Pallas; in response he orders his allies to stop fighting, claiming that "[. . .] I alone / meet Pallas; he is owed to me, my own. / I could have wished his father here to watch" (613-15; 441-43). The inaccuracy of his perception matches the impious nature of his remarks; Aeneas, not Pallas, should be Turnus's objective. Though overmatched, Pallas nevertheless faces Turnus bravely and piously (617-25; 444-51). In all the mismatches, the doomed combatant makes the first cast; in all the mismatches, the doomed combatant also demonstrates his *pietas*. Pallas's prayer to his patron, Hercules (638-43; 460-63), offers a pious contrast to Turnus's behavior; his sad death after his *aristeia* recalls the death of Patroclus after his *aristeia* (*Il.* 16). Patroclus's greatest feat is his killing of Sarpedon, son of Zeus—to prevent which (even though it is destined [*Il.* 16.433]) Zeus considers stealing his son from the fighting; Zeus must be dissuaded by Hera. She states the gods' opposition to rescuing a doomed mortal (16.442-43) and suggests that Death and Sleep remove Sarpedon's body to Lycia for "due burial / with tomb and gravestone. Such is the privilege of those who have perished" (*Il.* [Lattimore] 16.456-57). Zeus weeps tears of blood (459) at the thought of Sarpedon's coming death, which

is a major event in the *Iliad* for two reasons: First, [Sarpedon] is Zeus' son and provides a test case as to whether Zeus will go so far as to save him from death. But human mortality, in this tragic epic, is stronger than the power of the gods. Secondly, Sarpedon's death carries a further tragic irony in that he dies at the hands of Patroclus, who is himself doomed, the last victim of the death-littered promise of Zeus to Thetis—the greatest and most fatal act of Hector's *aristeia*.

(Gransden, *Virgil's Iliad* 141–42).

In the *Aeneid*, Hercules, another son of Zeus-Jupiter, reacts to Pallas's prayer with "tears that were useless"; Jupiter then consoles his son:

Each has his day; there is, for all, a short,  
irreparable time of life; the task  
of courage: to prolong one's fame by acts  
[.....]  
[ . . . ] even great Sarpedon,  
my own child, lost his life together with them.  
And Turnus, too, is called by his own fates;  
he has reached the border given to his years.

(Mandelbaum 10.648–50, 652–55; in Latin 467–72)

Although Vergil's Jupiter expresses Iliadic sentiments here (and takes Hera's place as the comforting deity), his reaction is not the painful and fated powerlessness of a divinity to save his own son but an acknowledgment of the limitations of *pietas*. Vergil's Hercules complicates this allusion to Homer. Rather than mourn because he cannot save his own son (the Iliadic example), he grieves because he cannot save the pious son of Evander (the son of Mercury), to whom he owes, and who owes to him, a debt of *pietas* for his stay in Evander's settlement (narrated in book 8).

Pallas's high point in battle is grazing Turnus on the first spear cast; Turnus's lance pierces the center of Pallas's shield and kills Pallas immediately (656–75; 474–89). With sarcastic magnanimity, with mock *pietas*, Turnus returns Pallas's body for funeral rites after removing Pallas's belt; he will later request from Aeneas just such a return of his own corpse. This scene thus makes two important thematic allusions to the *Iliad*: Jupiter's more cosmic Vergilian remarks enlarge on Zeus's personal Homeric grief, and the stripping of Pallas recalls the stripping of Patroclus—with similar dangers for the victor. In this first duel, which Turnus wins, Jupiter foretells the last, which Turnus will lose. Above the fallen Pallas, harshly noting what Evander has scarcely "deserved" (*qualem meruit*) and addressing the Arcadians, Aeneas's new allies, Turnus refers by name to Aeneas, mocking both his victim's father and his victim:

O Arcadians,  
 remember, take my words back to Evander:  
 just as he has deserved, I send him Pallas!  
 Whatever comfort lies in burial  
 I freely give. His welcome to Aeneas  
 will not have cost your King Evander little.  
 (676–81; 491–95)

He then immediately strips the belt.

Fallen later before Aeneas, humbly noting what he truly deserves (*merui*) and addressing Aeneas, Turnus refers by name to the Ausonians, Aeneas's future allies, invoking the victor's father—and the victim's:

Then humble, suppliant, he lifts his eyes  
 and, stretching out his hand, entreating, cries:  
 "I have indeed deserved this; I do not  
 appeal against it; use your chance. But if  
 there is a thought of a dear parent's grief  
 that now can touch you, then I beg you, pity  
 old Daunus—in Anchises you had such  
 a father—send me back or, if you wish,  
 send back my lifeless body to my kin."  
 (12.1240–48; 930–36)

Aeneas then immediately notices the stripped belt.

Aeneas's frenzied response to Pallas's death—killing many who stand between him and Turnus—draws to a narrative close only with the poet's interlude in which Juno wins a concession from Jupiter. This interlude allows Vergil to postpone the Aeneas-Turnus duel and enables him first to arrange the other major encounters. It also begins the most intense period of Aeneas's *aristeia*, which will have its climax in Turnus's death in the poem's very last line. Throughout the series of lesser combats leading to the four remaining matches of book 10, Aeneas responds bitterly to claims of *pietas* before killing ten named warriors (10.717–827; 521–605). This long section isolates the Turnus-Pallas encounter from the series; involving Aeneas, Mezentius, and Lausus, it responds to that encounter. With these incidents, most of which have significant Homeric precedents, Vergil shows Aeneas reacting darkly to the troubles offered to one so *pius*; these tests will make his encounters with Mezentius and Lausus even more emotionally complex.

Because Turnus does not pursue Aeneas, because Jupiter grants to Juno "a breathing space for that doomed youth" (856; 623), the two great antagonists do not meet until the poem's end. Turnus's response to the invasion is to seek Pallas (not Aeneas) alone. Aeneas, however, responds to Pallas's death by

seeking Turnus. He “grabs four youths alive, / four sons of Sulmo, then four raised by Ufens, / to offer up as victims to the Shade / of Pallas” (713–16; 517–19). These eight sons of Sulmo and Ufens recall Achilles’s capture of twelve youths to offer to Patroclus’s shade (*Il.* 21.26), but Vergil works significant changes on the deed. Achilles’s victims are unnamed; Homer comments repeatedly on his cruelty and the terror of the twelve victims, adding the piteous detail of their belts:

He, when his hands grew weary with killing,  
 chose out and took twelve young men alive from the river  
 to be vengeance for the death of Patroklos, the son of Menoitios.  
 These, bewildered with fear like fawns, he led out of the water  
 and bound their hands behind them with thongs well cut out of leather,  
 with the very belts they themselves wore on their ungirt tunics [. . .]  
 (*Il.* [Lattimore] 21.26–31)

Four complete books (about 2,400 lines, nearly one-sixth of the poem), separate Patroclus’s death from Achilles’s actions here. In the meantime Achilles has killed many men and faced in battle both Aeneas and Hector, who were saved by Poseidon and Apollo, respectively. Vergil is more immediate: as soon as Aeneas hears that Pallas has died, he captures his victims.

Homer’s episode of the captives precedes the story in which Lykaon supplicates Achilles, reminding him that he has already captured and ransomed him handsomely. Lykaon proclaims that he is not from the same womb as Hector, “who killed your powerful and kindly companion” (21.93–96). Achilles refuses the request because Patroclus is dead—and because Achilles too will die (110). He then tells all before him to die, in payment for Patroclus and the “slaughter of the Achaians / whom you killed beside the running ships when I was not with them” (122–35). Thus the only scene of captured prisoners in the *Iliad* precedes a noteworthy denial of pity to a suppliant.

The only scene of captured prisoners in the *Aeneid* also precedes a denial of *pietas* to a suppliant, but Vergil compresses these longer Homeric episodes to a horrifying concentration, only a few lines after Pallas’s death. The twelve unnamed youths seized by Achilles in the *Iliad* become the eight sons of two named fathers in the *Aeneid*. The Vergilian suppliant Magus, as the Homeric Lykaon does, refers to the wealth he can offer his captor. But Vergil adds the demands of *pietas*, both when Magus appeals and Aeneas sarcastically refuses:

He grips Aeneas’ knees and, suppliant,  
 he begs him: “By your father’s Shade and by  
 your hopes in rising Iulus, I entreat,  
 do spare this life for my own son and father.  
 I have a splendid house; there, hidden deep,

are many talents of chased silver; I  
 have heaps of wrought and unwrought gold; the victory  
 of Trojans cannot turn on me; one life  
 will not make such a difference”—so Magus.  
 Aeneas answered him: “Those heaps of talents,  
 the gold and silver that you tell of, Magus,  
 save them for your own sons; such bargaining  
 in war was set aside by Turnus first,  
 just now when he killed Pallas. This is what  
 Anchises’ Shade decides, and so says Iulus.”

(10.721–35; 521–34)

When Vergil adapts Achilles’s remarks about Patroclus and applies them to the avenging of Pallas, Aeneas refers not to himself but to Anchises and Iulus. For Lykaon’s claimed nonconnection to Hector, Vergil substitutes Magus’s claimed irrelevance to the battle. But his pretext recalls the sacrifice of Palinurus in book 5, when Poseidon says, “one life will be offered for many” (5.1077; “*unum pro multis dabitur caput*” [815; emphasis mine]): “the victory [. . .] cannot turn on me; one life / will not make such a difference” (10.727–29; “non hic victoria [. . .] vertitur aut *anima una dabit discrimina tanta*” [529; emphasis mine]). Thus all three changes wrought on the Lykaon episode emphasize *pietas*: the appeal in the names of father and son, the practical reason offered for sparing (“one life will not make a difference”), and the rejection in the names of father and son. *Pietas* toward Evander prompts Aeneas’s capture of the sons of Sulmo and Ufens and the rejection of Magus; the death of Evander’s son immediately moves Aeneas to destroy two remarkable families and claim his own family in denying a suppliant. And although he chases Turnus, before they meet he must, in his major combats, first wound a father (Mezentius), kill the son defending him (Lausus), and then kill the father.

Yet Aeneas’s cruel rejections (and claims) of *pietas* in all these scenes have an end that is not merely an emotional response to Pallas’s death (Achilles’s response to the death of Patroclus is merely emotional):

Such were the deaths dealt by the Dardan chieftain  
 across the plains while he raged like a torrent  
 or black whirlwind. The boy Ascanius  
 and all the warriors break out at last  
 and quit their camp site; now the siege is pointless.

(828–32; 602–05)

This too is *pietas*, in the relentless way in which Vergil arranges his narrative. Aeneas’s actions have saved his threatened son and the other besieged Trojans. The darker necessities of this quality prepare the reader for the remaining duels, in every one of which Aeneas prevails.

**C. Aeneas and Mezentius**  
**(Mandelbaum 10.1047–84; in Latin 762–88)**

One-fifth of book 10 intervenes between the death of Pallas and Aeneas's first meeting with Mezentius. This "cruel despiser of the gods" (7.855; 648) is nonetheless "spurred on by Jupiter," (10.943; 689). His *aristeia* lasts for more than a hundred lines before Aeneas meets him. Evander told Aeneas the story of Mezentius's cruel nature and the shelter given Mezentius by Turnus (8.626–45; 481–96); thus long before Allecto inflamed him (7.603–21; 456–70) and thereupon added a divine explanation for his behavior, Turnus welcomed and protected Mezentius. The expulsion of Mezentius recalls, in its language and imagery, Evander's earlier instructive tale told to Aeneas: Hercules's defeat of the monster Cacus (8.248–350; 184–272), around whose cave "The ground was always warm with recent slaughter / and fastened to the proud doorposts, the faces / of men hung pale with putrefaction" (8.259–61; 195–97). As Hercules once piously saved Evander's people, so now must Aeneas: "in just anger." Only Turnus has a greater buildup than Mezentius as an enemy to Aeneas.

Aeneas's two encounters with Mezentius (C, E) frame his meeting with Lausus (D), and although the Aeneas-Lausus duel answers the Turnus-Pallas fight (B), the entire cluster of meetings with Mezentius and Lausus (CDE) provides a complex answering episode to Turnus and Pallas. In B, Turnus wishes impiously for Pallas's father to watch the death of his son (10.615; 443); in CDE, Mezentius helps cause (C), must suffer (D), and then atones for (E) the death of his own son. The Mezentius cluster also anticipates the final duel with Turnus (F), especially in the way both Mezentius and Turnus face Aeneas in the end.

Mezentius stands "unfrightened, steady, and awaiting his / great-hearted enemy" (10.1059–60; 770–71). Just as he gave to his son, Lausus, the spoils from an earlier victory (960–62; 700–01), so he claims, in an ironic perversion of *pietas*, that he will win Aeneas's armor for his son:

My own right hand, which is my god, and this  
 my shaft that I now poise to cast, be gracious:  
 I vow that you yourself, Lausus, my son,  
 shall be the living trophy of Aeneas,  
 dressed in the spoils stripped from that robber's body.  
 (1062–66; 772–76)

Turnus stripped Pallas; Aeneas will not be stripped, nor will he strip Lausus. Mezentius's javelin misses, as do all the first casts in this series, but Aeneas, called *pious* as he throws, wounds Mezentius in the groin, at which sight "Lausus, for the love of his dear father / groaned deep" (1067, 1076, 1085–86; 777, 783, 789–90). The son, who must watch his father suffer, becomes the victim of a reluctant Aeneas; Aeneas is the mirror opposite of Turnus, who wished his victim's father present to see his son's death.

**D. Aeneas and Lausus**  
**(Mandelbaum 10.1085–141; in Latin 789–832)**

Vergil prompts the reader to pay special attention to this episode by his address of Lausus:

And here I surely shall not leave untold—  
 for such a deed can be more readily  
 believed because it was done long ago—  
 the trial of your harsh death and gallant acts  
 and you yourself, young man to be remembered.  
 (1087–91; 791–93)

This duel completes the arc from A (Pallas and Lausus) to D (Aeneas and Lausus). A more complicated nexus of *pietas* can scarcely be found in the entire *Aeneid*: Mezentius, repellent torturer who scorns the gods but loves his son, is defended by that splendid boy; Aeneas, *pious* defender of Mezentius's people, upbraids the son for his *pietas* but easily dispatches him:

[. . . Aeneas] taunts Lausus, menacing:  
 “Why are you rushing to sure death? Why dare  
 things that are past your strength? Your loyalty [*pietas*]  
 has tricked you into recklessness.” And yet  
 the youth is wild and will not stop; at this,  
 harsh anger rises in the Dardan chief;  
 the Fates draw the last thread of Lausus' life.  
 (1112–18; 810–15)

The contrast with B is telling: Turnus desired only to kill Pallas; Aeneas attempts to dissuade Lausus from battle. Turnus wanted Pallas's father to witness his son's death; Aeneas kills Lausus nearly in front of Mezentius but unwillingly. Pallas wounds Turnus slightly (the only defeated combatant to wound his killer); Lausus dies with no real attempt on Aeneas.

Although (in A) Vergil regards Pallas and Lausus as equals and although Lausus is “such a bulwark in that battle” (593; 427), the balance of greatness tips somewhat to Pallas. While Lausus has only one named victim, Abas (595; 427), Pallas has a detailed *aristeia* (501–92; 362–425) with eight victims named; he urges his men to “attack where the mass is thickest” (515; 373). The parallel between Pallas and Patroclus is clear: both are killed after an *aristeia*, both have close ties to the hero, both are stripped of their armor, and both provide an added incentive for the hero's rage. Even though Pallas is called a “youth” at the beginning of B (617; 445), nothing subsequent to this word detracts from his status as a warrior. He faces Turnus calmly; dismisses his threats; hopes for the greatest Roman military prize, the armor of the opposing general (*spolia*

*opima*); prays to Hercules ("let his dying eyes see me a conqueror"); and dies, pierced in his "enormous chest" (625, 623, 642, 670; 450, 449, 462, 485).

In contrast, Vergil reduces everything about Lausus. He never answers or challenges Aeneas: "the youth is wild and will not stop" (1116; 813). Though he dies almost in his father's presence, the details are softer, smaller, gentler, and feminine:

The blade passed through the shield, too thin  
for one who was so threatening, and through  
the tunic Lausus' mother spun for him  
of supple gold. His chest was filled with blood;  
across the air his melancholy life  
passed on into the Shades and left his body.  
But when he saw the look and face of dying  
Lausus—he was mysteriously pale—  
Anchises' son sighed heavily with pity [. . .].  
(1121–29; 817–23)

Lausus's pallor recalls two women in the poem, Dido and Cleopatra, both "pale with approaching death" (4.891; 644) (8.925; 709). No challenge is made, no weapon is cast; even his armor is "thin." His "supple gold" tunic brings his mother into the picture. Only after death—when brought by his comrades back to his father, not when he must face the hero of the *Aeneid*—does Lausus become "a giant corpse undone / by giant wounds" (10.1154–55; 842). Only after death, when brought by his comrades back to his father, will Pallas be softened:

They set  
the soldier high upon his rustic bed:  
just as a flower of gentle violet  
or drooping hyacinth a girl has gathered;  
its brightness and its form have not yet passed,  
but mother earth no longer feeds it or  
supplies its strength. And then Aeneas brought  
twin tunics, stiff with gold and purple, which  
Sidonian Dido, glad in that task, had  
once made for him with her own hands [. . .].  
(11.88–97; 62–75)

Turnus stripped Pallas (B), and in mock magnanimity boasted to the Arcadians (above, section B). Aeneas refuses to strip Lausus, and in genuine magnanimity proclaims:

*Poor boy [miserande puer], for such an act what can the pious  
Aeneas give to match so bright a nature?*



Keep as your own the arms that made you glad;  
 and to the Shades and ashes of your parents  
 I give you back—if Shades still care for that.  
 But, luckless, you can be consoled by this:  
 you fall beneath the hand of great Aeneas.

(10.1132–38; 825–30; emphasis mine)

His words recall the words of his own father in the Underworld; Anchises praises the shade of Marcellus, the emperor Augustus's designated successor and son-in-law, who died young: "O boy whom we lament [*miserande puer*] [. . .]" (6.1177; 882; emphasis mine). Vergil uses the phrase only one more time, when he addresses the dead Pallas, paying him "useless honors" (11.69; 52) before returning his body to Evander. Thus the phrase, spoken only by Aeneas and his father, makes a final link between Pallas and Lausus. Turnus defiled the dead Pallas ("his left foot pressed upon the body" [10.682]); Aeneas acts quite differently: "He even calls the hesitating comrades / of Lausus, and he lifts the body off / the ground, where blood defiled the handsome hair" (11.39–41; 830–32).

### ***E. Aeneas and Mezentius***

#### **(Mandelbaum 10.1198–1247; in Latin 872–908)**

With his son's death, the worst villain of the poem grows somewhat in stature—just in time to die:

Am I, a father, saved by these your wounds?  
 Do I live by your death? For now at last  
 I understand the misery of exile,  
 and now at last my wound is driven deep.  
 More, I myself have stained your name, my son,  
 with sins; for I was banished—hated—from  
 the throne and royal power of my fathers.  
 I owed my homeland and my angry people  
 their right revenge; I should have given up  
 this guilty life to death from every side.  
 But I still live, have still not left the light  
 of day, the land of men. But I shall leave them.

(1163–74; 848–56)

With the possible exception of Dido, Mezentius might be the most introspective character of the poem—at least in facing death. Episode E (the effect) forms a frame (with C, the cause) around the scene of Lausus's death (D).

Aeneas welcomes the chance to face Mezentius, but Vergil has again

adjusted the view of the reader. Mezentius's words are brave, subdued, impious still, blunt. Aeneas becomes, in this scene, the harsher one:

You savage one, why try to frighten me  
now that my son is torn away? That was  
the only way to ruin me. For I  
do not fear death or care for any god.  
Enough; I come to die. But first I bring  
these gifts to you. (1205–10; 878–82)

As in all the unsuccessful duels (except for the duel of Lausus, who never casts), the wounded Mezentius throws first and misses three times. The contest is “unequal” (1221) not because Mezentius is wounded and thus threatened but because he is on horseback and thus favored. Only in this respect, and in this instance alone, does Aeneas suffer any disadvantage during these combats.

Mezentius is the first of the fallen combatants to address his victor. Aeneas taunts, with a lower tone:

“Where now is brave Mezentius, and where is  
his ruthless force of mind?” The Tuscan drank  
the air and watched the sky and came to life  
and then replied: “My bitter enemy,  
why do you taunt and threaten me? There is  
no crime in killing me; I did not come  
to war with any thought of quarter, nor  
did Lausus ever draw such terms with you.  
I ask you only this: if any grace  
is given to the vanquished, let my body  
be laid in earth. I know my people's harsh  
hatred that hems me in. I beg of you  
to save me from their fury, let me be  
companion to my son within the tomb.”  
(1232–45; 897–906)

If earlier he recalled to the reader Achilles (where Achilles addresses his horse; cf. Achilles's address to Xanthos [*Il.* 19.400–23] with Mezentius's address to Rhoebus [1181–89; 861–66]), here Mezentius, anticipating Turnus at the end of the poem, recalls Hector in asking for burial though not for mercy (*Il.* 22.338–43). His final words, driven by *pietas*, consider his son. His taunting, “savage,” “bitter enemy” makes no reply; Aeneas's *pietas* (to Evander and the allied Etruscans) is in sacrificing Mezentius: “with full awareness, / he gives his throat up to the sword, and pours / his life in waves of blood across his armor” (1246–48; 907–08). Mezentius's death closes the book without response from Aeneas; Turnus's death will so end book 12. In each case the poet deprives the

reader of the hero's response to his deed; only with Lausus does Aeneas respond. With the long interlude of book 11, which concentrates on the side story of Camilla, and with the expanse of book 12, the poem's longest book, nearly one-fifth of the poem intervenes before Aeneas will face the final duel with Turnus. But the difficulties of that encounter have been prepared by the events of *Aeneid* 10: "In his first day of hard combat, Aeneas has displayed the complex qualities—sanity, valor, strength, hot indignation, cruelty, pitilessness, compassion (not all, by any means, lovely virtues in isolation)—which are demanded of a victorious general" (Anderson, *Art* 75).

### ***F. Aeneas and Turnus*** **(Mandelbaum 12.1178–271; in Latin 908–52)**

This is no place for an extended discussion of the poem's ending; let me merely connect that scene with the preceding series of fights. The final duel of the poem recalls not only the Homeric precedents—the deaths of Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Hector—but also the previous series of combats in the tenth book. Aeneas and Turnus (F), the matched heroes whose duel the Fates demand, balance Pallas and Lausus (A), the matched youths whose duel Jupiter forbids. In this contest Turnus pays for his actions in B; Aeneas himself makes Pallas the victor:

How can you who wear the spoils of my  
dear comrade now escape me? It is Pallas  
who strikes, who sacrifices you, who takes  
this payment from your shameless blood.  
(1265–68; 947–49)

Like Mezentius (C), Turnus misses his cast, a rock, and receives a wound, in the thigh (1208, 1235). Although Aeneas's conduct toward the dead Lausus (D) seems to anticipate his conduct toward the suppliant Turnus (F), he finally acts instead as he did toward Mezentius (E). Mezentius and Turnus both admit defeat, though with a different emphasis: Mezentius the father asks only burial with his dead son; Turnus invokes his living father in requesting mercy:

I have indeed deserved this; I do not  
appeal against it; use your chance. But if  
there is a thought of a dear parent's grief  
that now can touch you, then I beg you, pity  
old Daunus—in Anchises you had such  
a father—send me back or, if you wish,  
send back my lifeless body to my kin.  
(1242–48; 931–36)

In Vergil's tone, *pietas* reduces Pallas from warrior (B) to child. The sight of "the luckless belt of Pallas, of the boy / whom Turnus had defeated" (1257–58; 941–44) brings to mind the "dear parent's grief" of Evander, whom Turnus desired as witness to Pallas's death. Invoked by Turnus to gain clemency, parental grief demands from Aeneas retribution.

Yet Vergil imposes a disquieting perspective. In every previous duel the reader's sympathy at some point turns toward the victim: to Pallas (B), because of his bravery and Turnus's arrogance; to Lausus (D), out of pity for his youth—and because Aeneas rewards his sacrifice; to Mezentius (E), when he offers his neck to the sword. With Turnus at the poem's close, Vergil literally changes the reader's viewpoint with the poem's final simile. When Turnus fails in his cast, he

[. . .] does not know if it is he  
 himself who runs or goes or lifts or throws  
 that massive rock; his knees are weak; his blood  
 congeals with cold. The stone itself whirls through  
 the empty void but does not cross all of  
 the space between; it does not strike a blow.  
 Just as in dreams of night, when languid rest  
 has closed *our* eyes, *we* seem in vain to wish  
 to press on down a path, but as *we* strain,  
*we* falter, weak; *our* tongues can say nothing,  
 the body loses its familiar force,  
 no voice, no word, can follow [. . .].

(1203–14; 903–12; emphasis mine)

Even this unsettling shift to the first-person plural may have a Homeric precedent modified by Vergil. The most singular and egotistical of the Iliadic heroes, Achilles, responds to the fallen Hector:

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 was,  
 behind him and away by the hollow ships. And it was I;  
 and I have broken your strength. (*Il.* [Lattimore] 22.331–35)

Not only does he reject Hector's entreaty "by your life, by your knees, by your parents" (338) for burial, he also gives the final expression of how personal is this combat: "I wish only that my spirit and fury would drive me / to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things / that you have done to me" (346–48). After this statement comes the astounding change in Achilles's words, from the raging first-person singular to the plural:

But now, you young men of the Achaians, let *us* go back, singing  
 a victory song, to *our* hollow ships; and take this with *us*.

We have won *ourselves* enormous fame; we have killed the great Hektor whom the Trojans glorified as if he were a god in their city.

(391–94; emphasis mine)

Homer's plurals after the death of Hector mark Achilles's complete and momentous return to his society; the reader regards Achilles differently (and Achilles could be said to regard himself somewhat differently). Vergil's plurals before the death of Turnus likewise force the reader to regard Aeneas differently.

This dream simile recalls the stunned and dreamlike state of Patroclus just before Hector kills him (*Il.* 16.786–92)—a blurring of Hector and Patroclus in Turnus's actions, like the blurring of Patroclus and Sarpedon in Pallas. But Vergil once more changes the Homeric orientation:

For this last long simile in his poem Vergil once again invents a radical transformation of his model. Homer is interested, in the simile, in emphasizing the all but equal strength and valor of his two opposing figures, and if there is a slight imbalance in this near equilibrium, it is to be discovered in the frustrations of the pursuer who dreams, not with the pursued. I say "dreams" because the equilibrium that obtains between the pursuer and the pursued, while it may be frustrating and unpleasant for the pursuer, does not become horrible. Homer's dream is not a nightmare, as it might be if it were the pursued who was dreaming. In Vergil's simile, of course, it is the pursued who dreams, and his dream is one of the great nightmares of poetry; this nightmare is a suitable recapitulation of what has immediately preceded it, and is a transition to, and adumbration of, the closing moments of the poem, for both the nightmare and the closing action of the poem are presented from the viewpoint of Turnus. So it is fitting that his growing terror, his despair, and his sudden and final inability to act should be crystallized in this simile.

(Johnson, *Darkness* 97–98)

The simile also means that when Turnus "trembles at the coming spear" (12.1220; 916) the reader, who has been drawn literally into Turnus's perspective because of such "dreams of night," looks up helplessly at Aeneas's threatening spearpoint. "We" who have weighed all the demanding requirements of *pietas* in the preceding five duels, "falter, weak" and feel directed at us the *pietas* of Aeneas's final savagery. This perspective proves even more stunning because of the changing expectations aroused in the previous combats.

#### NOTE

I dedicate this essay in memoriam to Barbara Fowler, who first taught me how to read Latin poetry. I am indebted to William S. Anderson, Lorina Quartarone, and Michael Kandel for their comments and suggestions.