

***Aeneid* from Book 9**
Translation by David Hadbawnik; images by Omar Al-Nakib

[*With Aeneas away solidifying allies, the Trojans are hunkered down refusing to leave camp as Turnus and his army threaten. In frustration Turnus attempts to burn the Trojan fleet, only to see it miraculously saved and the ships turned into sea nymphs by Jupiter.*]

II. ‘*Sed periisse semel satis est.*’

Awe grips the Rutulian minds.
Messapus is spooked,
also his horses,
at the noise of gurgling water.

But TURNUS
doesn’t flinch.

He alone raises their spirits
and settles them with his words.

“Sure these are bad signs ...
for the *Trojans*.

Jupiter himself snatches away
any expectation of help—
and we didn’t have to fight or burn anything.
They’ve got nowhere to run.
Italy’s up in arms.

The Fates?
They don’t frighten me.
Whatever the Phrygian oracles
twist,
Venus is paid in full,
because they’ve touched down
here.

I’ve got my own destiny.
And a sharp sword to cut down
a crime-ridden race
that stole my bride.

It’s not just the sons of Atreus *that* sorrow touches.
Myceneans aren’t the only ones
allowed to bear arms.
But to die once is enough.
To sin once is enough,
or it would’ve been,
if from here on out they hate women
(you’d think they would after what happened with Helen),

these bastards for whom faith
in crappy walls and makeshift fortifications
– a slight pause before death –
gives courage.

Didn't they just watch Troy's walls
made by Neptune
engulfed in flames?

But you chosen lot,
who'll come with me to chop down ramparts
and invade that quivering camp?
There's no Vulcan-forged arms for me.
I don't have a thousand ships.
Etruscans? Who needs 'em?
Let them join the Trojans and not be afraid
of shadows and guards killed
by the citadel gates.
We don't cower in an empty cave;
in plain sight we rile their walls
with flames. They won't have to
cope with Greeks and Pelasgian children,
whom Hector fended off for ten years.
Now, since the best part of day is gone,
for what's left, relax
and look to your bodies after a job well done,
men, and get ready to fight.”



Meanwhile it falls to Messapus
to keep lookout and maintain
the menacing fires.

14 Rutulians are chosen to hold
the integrity of the perimeter, but
each one's followed by 100 men
decked out in plumes of purple and gold.

They march back and forth,
changing the watch, lying
on the grass drinking wine
and tipping over
 the empty bronze bowls.

Fires burn. Guards pass a sleepless night
 at play.

The Trojans take this in from the ramparts,
 alarmed
lest they try the gates
or dig out the bulwarks.
Mnestheus and tough Serestus,
the designated leaders if anything
should befall Aeneas, direct the defense.

All along the walls the whole army
camps out, watching.
Taking shifts, each to his given task.
Nisus, their toughest S.O.B., holds the gate.
He's a good man with a spear
and light arrows. With him,
 Euryalus, best-looking
 among the *Aeneades*,
who fills out his uniform
like nobody's business—
a fresh-faced lad whose cheeks
preserve the flower of youth.

One love burns between them.
In battle always one
right beside the other,
and now they man the gates
together as sentries.

Nisus says:
 "Do the gods

give us this ardor, Euryalus,
or is a god made
by each man's awful desire?
For time out of mind
my heart's nudged me to fight
or do *something*,
something great,
and it won't rest until I do.
See how quiet it is out there.
The Rutulians lie strewn about,
fires flickering here and there,
loosened by sleep and wine.

Not a soul stirs.

You hear what I'm saying?
Savvy where I'm going with this?
People and senate both look to Aeneas,
and if they agree to my terms for you—
because all I ask is the day's glory—
seems to me I can map
a path beneath yonder mound
straight through to the walls
and bulwarks of Pallenteum.”



Euryalus, struck dumb,
gathers himself and speaks to his dear friend:

“Will you really run off and keep me
from joining this adventure?
Should I let you go it alone?
That’s not how my dad,
a man’s man who trained me
to survive the Greek terror
in Troy’s darkest hour,
would want it; and I haven’t
dragged my ass to hell and back
following Aeneas simply
to go limp now. Life’s a light thing
beside the fame you seek.”

Nisus:

“I love you.
I have no reservations about you,
nor about my fate.
So, Jupiter, or
whoever’s watching:
let it rip.

...But.

But...

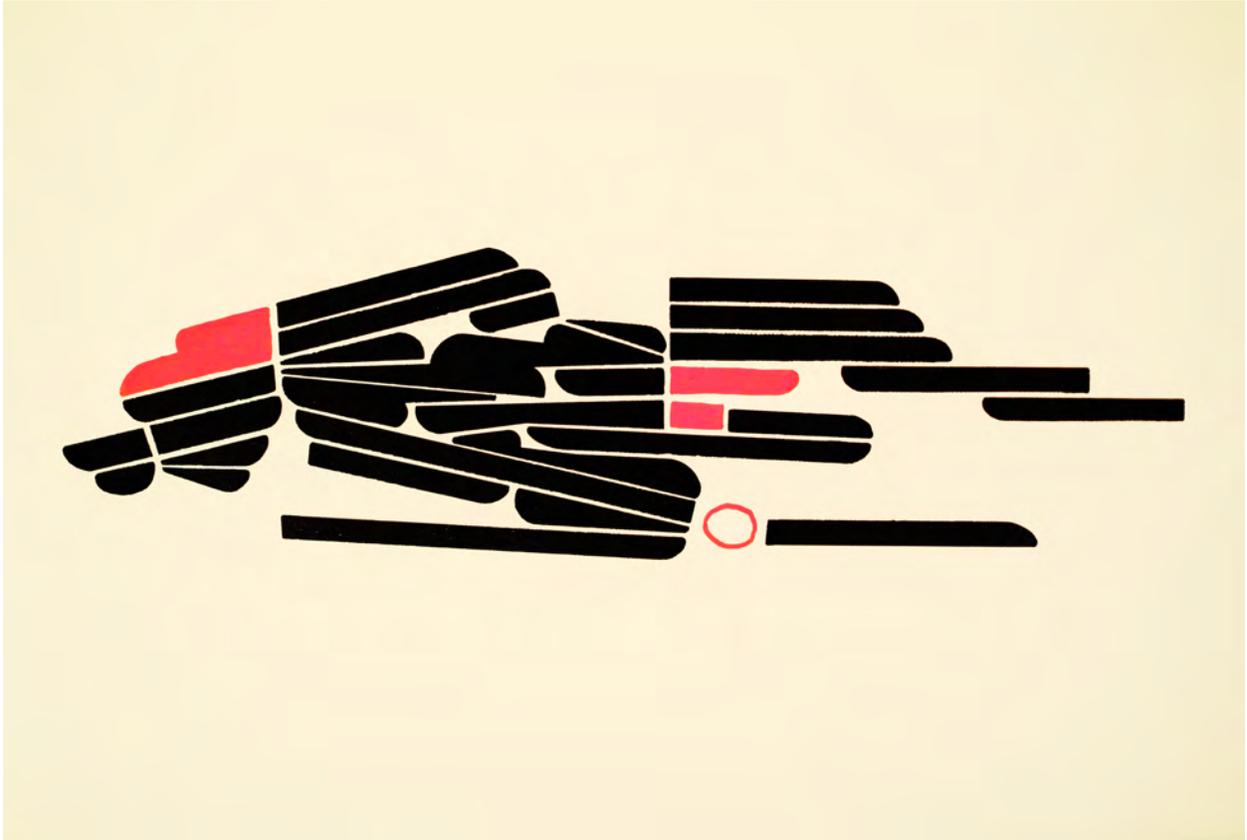
if (as you often see in these scenarios)
some god or fate snatches me away,
I want you to live. You deserve
more time on earth. Besides,
you can stick around, bury me,
perform appropriate rites.
And, friend, don’t let me
be the cause of a mother’s grief,
a mother who dared tag along
and doesn’t give a damn for these walls.”

Euryalus:

“This is silly. I’m coming with you.
Let’s go.”

Together they rush off to seek their leader.

III. *non tamen omnino Teucros delere paratis*



Everyone's fast asleep. All but the chosen captains
holding a secret meeting to decide what to do,
who'll rush off to get a message to Aeneas.
They stand leaning on long spears
in the center of camp. Nisus and Euryalus
burst into their circle, all apologies
and eagerness. Ascanius receives them
and bids Nisus to talk.

"Listen," he begins, drawing a deep breath.
"Don't judge what we're about to say
based on the meager years between us.

The Rutulians
are conked out on wine and sleep.
We ourselves spied a good place
for an ambush, an exposed spot
that lies by the gate near the sea.
Their fires are out and smoke

twists up to the stars. If
you give us this chance,
you'll soon see us back here
loaded with spoils after killing
tons of guys. And we won't have any trouble
finding Aeneas and the walls of Pallanteum –
from our hunting excursions
we know all the dim corners
of the city and ins and outs
of the whole river.”

Aletes, heavy with years and a seasoned spirit, says:

“Gods of our fathers, in spite of everything
you didn't want Troy utterly destroyed!
Not when such fire and resolve burn
in the breasts of these young men!”

And he claps them both on the shoulders, tears
staining his aged cheeks.

“What would be a big enough reward
for such derring-do?
The first and sweetest will come
from the gods and your own hearts.
The rest Aeneas himself will see to,
him and young Ascanius,
who'll never forget such worthy deeds.”

“That's right,” Ascanius chimes in.
“There's no way I – whose whole future depends
on the safe return of my dad – would leave you
hanging. I promise on the household gods:
Whatever faith and fortune there is of mine
I place in your laps. Bring back my father.
Bring him back. If he's here everything's good.
I'll give you two silver goblets finished with sharp insignia
my dad took when he beat Arisba.
And twin tripods, two giant talents of gold,
and an old bowl gifted by Dido.
If we're truly meant to seize Italy,
take the crown and divvy up spoils –
well, you must've seen Turnus's horse,
on which he prances about in golden arms –
that horse, and the shield and red plumes
that go with it, I was going to take.
Nisus, they're yours. That's not all.

My father will throw in twelve mothers
of the best beauty, and male captives, too,
along with their arms, and beyond that
whatever land King Latinus now holds.
As for you, Euryalus, so close to my own age,
I take you wholly to heart and make you
a comrade in all things. Nothing I do
from here on out, whether in peace
or war, will be done without you.
I'll hold you close in word and deed."

Euryalus replies:

"There will never be a day I'm not brave enough
for such deeds. Just let fortune be kind,
not cruel. But there's one thing I ask.
My mother. My mother followed me here
against all odds. She won't know the dangers
I face. I can't say goodbye to her – as I'm sure
you understand – because, moms.
Don't let me leave without promising
you'll go to her and comfort her,
relieve her sense of abandonment.
Do that, and I'll step boldly
into whatever comes."

The young guys cry, Ascanius most of all, touched by such filial devotion.

Then he speaks:

"Rest assured I'll live up to your great enterprise.
She'll be like a mother to me, with only the name
Creusa missing. After all, she deserves it
for bearing such a son. Whatever happens,
I swear on my head, as my father has sworn before,
what I promise you on your successful return
is meant for mother and son alike."

David Hadbawnik is a poet and translator who currently teaches at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. His translation of *Aeneid* books 1-6 was published by Shearsman in 2015, and selections have appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *Chicago Review*, and *seedings*.

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