

Dum Conderet Requiem:
The Foundation of Rome and the Death of Turnus in Augustine's *Confessions*

St. Augustine intentionally patterned his autobiography *Confessions* on the plot of Vergil's *Aeneid*, drawing a parallel between his naval journey from Carthage to Italy and that of Aeneas (see O'Meara 1988). He draws not only on the plot, but also on the themes, of Vergil's work (Fichter 1982); while Aeneas founds the civilization of Rome, Augustine enters Christendom. At the *Aeneid*'s conclusion, in order to fulfill his destiny and found Rome, Aeneas chooses to enact vengeance upon his enemy Turnus, disobeying his father's injunction that Romans must spare the downtrodden (*parcere subiectis, debellare superbos*, *Aeneid* 6.853). The Latin verb Vergil uses to describe Aeneas' slaying of Turnus, *condere*, refers to the establishment of the city in the poem's opening (*Aeneid* 1.5, 12.950); in this way he deliberately identifies the foundation of Rome with Turnus' death (Edgeworth 2005, James 1995).

Having recognized the similar narrative threads of the two books, readers might expect Augustine, as the parallel to Aeneas, to complete his conversion in a similar manner, perhaps by taking revenge on the sin that stands in his way. But in a striking turn, Augustine gives the role of victor and founder to God, who slays his sinful nature, piercing it with the sword of His word. As Augustine argues in *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*, the work of administering mercy and casting down the proud belongs to God, not to any man (*De Civitate Dei* introduction). Directly quoting the *Aeneid*, Augustine argues that Christendom is the true Rome, because its ruler is the only one who can rightly fulfill the Roman task. Meanwhile, throughout the *Confessions*, he calls conversion a *debellata superbia*, or conquered pride (*Confessions* 8.4.15), identifying it with the death of the old self (see 9.6.14). This death cannot be accomplished by man, but only by God, who serves as the *conditor* of Augustine's new life in Christendom, piercing him with charity instead of anger (9.2.3). The echoes of the *Aeneid* in *Confessions* allow Augustine to reframe the Roman task

as a Christian one, completed by the God who slays men's old selves that he may welcome them into his dominion.

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