

Lucretian Coloring in the Death of Turnus

The death of Turnus at the end of *Aeneid* 12 is marked by a number of significant Lucretian allusions clustered around the failed stone-throwing at *Aeneid* 12.894-907. After Homer, whose *Iliad* provides various structural models for Turnus' death (Knauer 1964), Lucretius is by far the most important allusive source for the end of the poem, in terms of both thematic importance (Conington 1898, Warde Fowler 1919) and the sheer number of identifiable references (so first Merrill, 1918, followed by subsequent commentators; most recently *cf.* Tarrant, 2012 *ad loc.*). These allusions portray Turnus as the victim of philosophical ignorance, a character-type depicted memorably by Lucretius in the image of the forlorn ploughman at the end of Book 2 of *De Rerum Natura* (2.1164-74). The comparison of Turnus to someone who fails to grasp the truth of Epicurean philosophy increases the aura of futility surrounding his final duel with Aeneas, but in a way that should foster sympathy in those readers who are attuned to the Lucretian details.

Virgil produces this effect by casting obvious Homeric details in the subtle light of Lucretian atomism. While Turnus' stone-throwing is based on a mix of analogous scenes in the *Iliad*, various similes and physical details of the stone's flight in the *Aeneid* are depicted in the Lucretian language of atoms and the void. First, Virgil reworks a Homeric simile describing the massive size of the stone to be thrown (*Il.* 5.304, 12.383, 12.449, 20.287) so as to conflate human bodies (*corpora*) with Lucretius' preferred term for atoms (*Aen.* 12.900). Virgil also uses a distinctly Lucretian phrase for the Epicurean void (*vacuum per inane*) to describe the stone's failed flight through the air toward Aeneas (12.906). Finally, the poet allusively compares Turnus' reaction to his failed stone-throwing, which is based on a famous dream simile from Hector's death scene in the *Iliad*, to Lucretius' atomistic explanation of dream images in Book 4

of *De Rerum Natura* (*Aen.* 12.908-12). Taken together, these details create a sharp contrast between the fated certainty of Aeneas' actions and the futile, atomistic flailing of Turnus, whose misunderstanding of his true role in the poem leads him to philosophical frustration and failure. Given the discrepancy between Lucretius' materialist philosophy and the epic theology of the *Aeneid*, with its underworld and its interventionist gods, the presence of so much Lucretian philosophy at the moment of Turnus' death may shed some light on the larger issue of the relationship between Epicureanism and the epic genre in the *Aeneid* (Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 1990, Hardie 1986).

Bibliography

- Conington, J. and H. Nettleship. 1883. *The Works of Virgil*. 3 vols. London.
- Warde Fowler, W. 1919. *The Death of Turnus: Observations on the Twelfth Book of the Aeneid*. Oxford.
- Hardie, P. 1986. *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*. Oxford.
- Knauer, G.N. 1964. *Die Aeneis und Homer: Studien zur poetischen Technik Vergils mit Listen der Homerzitate in der Aeneis*. Göttingen.
- Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, V. 1990. *Les incertitudes de Virgile: Contributions épicuriennes à la théologie de l'Énéide*. Brussels.
- Merrill, A. 1918. "Parallels & Coincidences in Lucretius and Vergil." *Publications of the University of California in Classical Philology* 3: 135-247.
- Tarrant, R. (ed.) 2012. *Virgil: Aeneid Book XII*. Cambridge.