

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

VOLCANOES AND VOLCANIC CHARACTERS IN VIRGIL

For years, while he was writing the *Georgics* and parts of the *Aeneid*, Virgil lived in a volcanic region, in "sweet Parthenope." Across the bay of Naples, Vesuvius had been sleeping many centuries now, but nearby, to the west, were the Phlegraean Fields with their many craters and, near Puteoli, the Solfatara or *Forum Vulcani* with its sulfurous emanations. Then too, as the old *Vita* tells us, Virgil liked to spend some time in Sicily, and there Mt. Etna was to be seen with its nimbus of clouds and legends. On the way there he could easily have sailed by the Aeolian Isles and seen Stromboli with its spectacular eruptions and watched from the ship the smoking fumaroles on Vulcano. At all events, from his descriptions of volcanoes and volcanic regions, we readily gather the impression that he is recalling sights he had seen with his own eyes. How true to fact, even though described in mythical terms, is his picture of Vulcano in *Aen.* 8. 416–22, which I give in the translation of C. Day Lewis:

Between the Sicilian coast and Aeolian Lipare,
there's an
Island, whose cliffs, sheer-rising, jet out smoke
from their crannies:
Deep within are vaults, a rumbling volcanic
cavern. . . ;
Here is Vulcan's place; the island is called
Vulcania.

Let us then examine these passages and along the way try to show that, as Mackail remarked in his *Classical Studies*, "the more carefully we study Virgil, the more shall we realize that . . . he is everywhere true to nature, though he wraps it all in his medium of strange gold."¹

Toward the close of *Georgic* 1 (471 ff.), Virgil tells of the *prodigia* or unnatural happenings which followed the murder of Julius Caesar.

Among these were repeated eruptions of Etna: "quotiens Cyclopus effervere in agros / vidi-mus, undantem ruptis fornacibus Aetnam, / flammaramque globos liquefactaque volvere saxa." A literal translation would run as follows: "How often we saw Etna well up in waves from its burst furnaces and boil over on the fields of the Cyclopes, rolling up balls of fire and molten rocks." A modern volcanologist might report similar phenomena in these terms: "I have often seen Etna pour forth wave on wave of lava from its craters and send up rolls of eddying clouds of ash and incandescent bombs."

The same phenomena are portrayed in much more lavish colors in *Aen.* 3. 571–87. As Aeneas and his men sail along the south coast of Italy, they catch sight of Etna far off (554 ff.). They sail on and at sundown put in at a haven in Sicily, a safe anchorage, but nearby Etna keeps them sleepless with its thunderous eruptions and pyrotechnic displays:

interdumque atram prorumpit ad aethera nubem
turbine fumantem piceo et candente favilla,
attollitque globos flammaram et sidera lambit;
interdum scopulos avulsaque viscera montis
erigit eructans, liquefactaque saxa sub auras
cum gemitu glomerat fundoque exaestuat imo
[572–77].

This passage was severely criticized by the philosopher Favorinus, as reported by Gellius (17. 10. 9 ff.). Comparing it with Pindar's more sober description (*Pyth.* 1. 21 ff.), he castigated it for its factual inaccuracy and rhetorical extravagance. C. G. Heyne defended Virgil, but even he admitted that the poet took more pains over the poetical adornment than over the effort to achieve scientific exactness.² Now if we come to this highly colored passage with

1. J. W. Mackail, *Classical Studies* (New York, 1925), p. 111. The English translations (slightly changed at times) are taken from C. Day Lewis, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (Oxford, 1952).

2. P. Virgilius Maro⁴ (Leipzig, 1832), Excurs. xv: "Illud quidem mihi satis apparere videtur, poetam plus in verborum ornatu laborasse quam in physica subtilitate."

the passage in the *Georgics* (cited above) fresh in our minds, we naturally expect to find the same two series of phenomena that we saw there: on the one hand the lava flow and on the other an explosive phase. And that is precisely what we do find here but in reverse order. Some modern translations give a confused picture of the sequence of events, even omitting the lava flow entirely.

Before commenting on the details of these lines, it may be useful to consult some ancient and modern authorities to ascertain what a typical eruption of Etna is like. Thus we shall have a kind of standard by which to judge the substantial accuracy of Virgil's picture. Strabo, a contemporary of Virgil, visited the region and questioned some men "who had recently made the ascent" (6. 2. 8). From them he learned that the highest parts of the mountain underwent many changes because of the way the volcanic fire distributed itself. "For at one time the fire concentrates in one crater, but at another it divides; at one time the mountain sends forth lava, at another flames and fiery smoke, and at still other times it also emits red-hot masses," which I take to be volcanic bombs. Modern volcanologists tell us that a typical eruption of Etna consists of a lava flow in which lava issues from a fissure on the side of a crater while, higher up the cone, explosive eruptions of ash, etc., take place.³ In fact, a glance at a night photo of such a "mixed" eruption will give a better idea than many words could of what Aeneas and his men are supposed to have seen that night.⁴

Returning now to Virgil, I give C. Day Lewis' translation of *Aen.* 3. 571 ff., which impresses me as the most accurate I have seen:

Aetna thunderously erupts.
Ever and anon it discharges at heaven a murky
cloud,
A swirl of pitch-black smoke lurid with white-hot
cinders,
And volleys huge balls of flame, singeing the very
stars.

Ever and anon, as if the mountain's guts were
being coughed up,
It belches rock, and groaning, vomits out thick
streams
Of lava, seething from its roots.

For an understanding in depth of these lines, the notes of R. D. Williams in the recent Oxford edition are very helpful. I venture, however, to make a few changes. Instead of saying (*ad* 572 ff.) that the first *interdum* clause "describes the more visual aspects of flame and smoke, and the second (575 ff.) the active features of an eruption," I should say rather that the first describes the explosive phase, the violent ejection of black ash and incandescent scoriae-bombs thrown high in the air, while the second pictures what happened closer to the ground, the extrusion of large boulders (probably blocks of older lava) and the welling up of boiling lava from the depths. There is little to cause difficulty in the first *interdum* clause, but the second presents a picture that is far from clear at first reading. Witness the many different versions given by modern translators. Williams (*ad* 575 ff.) renders as follows: "sometimes it belches forth and hurls high rocks torn from the living body of the mountain, and groaning brings up balls of molten rock to the surface, bubbling up and boiling from its very foundations" [italics mine]. This is well done, but for "balls of molten rock" I should prefer "compact masses," while "hurls high rocks" is hardly what Virgil says. First, there is nothing in the Latin that means "hurls high." *Erigit* in Virgil means simply "raise" and it needs some other word or phrase to convey the idea of raising to a great height.⁵ Virgil is generally an orderly writer. Having finished with the explosive phase in the first *interdum* clause, he is now dealing with another less violent phase, as set forth above. The operative word that colors and limits the meaning of *erigit* is *eructans* (cf. 632, of the Cyclops) which hardly suggests "raising to a great height."

While he was composing these lines, Virgil

3. The two books I have found most useful on Etna are: A. Rittmann, *Volcanoes and their Activity*, Eng. trans. E. A. Vincent (New York, 1962); and F. M. Bullard, *Volcanoes in History, in Theory, in Eruption* (Austin, 1962).

4. Rittmann, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 22 (figs. 14-15), has such a photograph.

5. Cf. *Aen.* 3. 422-23, 7. 529-30, 9. 239. In the passive it is used of islands which "rise up" from the sea, as in 8. 416-17.

no doubt had Lucretius 6. 680 ff. in mind. Speaking of "the stormy force of air," Lucretius tells how it scatters smoke and ashes afar, "extruditque simul mirando pondere saxa" (692). Now *extrudit* here should mean, *pace* Bailey and Monro, "pushes or thrusts out," not "hurls high," and this is close to Virgil's meaning in *erigit eructans*. It is true that a volcano at times has tremendous force. In 1930, Stromboli hurled blocks of stone weighing many tons as far as three kilometers away. But I submit that Virgil's words do not mean what many translators (excepting C. Day Lewis) try to make them mean.

Before Lucretius, two great Greek poets had described Etna in eruption: Pindar (*Pyth.* 1. 21–24) and Aeschylus (*P.V.* 366–72). Pindar pictures "the pure founts of unapproachable fire which belch from its depths; the rivers of lava which by day pour forth a glowing stream of smoke while by night purple flame (from the same lava) carries in its whirl rocks to the sea with a crash." Here we have both the lava flow and the rocks which figure in Virgil's description.

One may naturally wonder why Virgil lavishes so many words on this picture of Etna in eruption. Two reasons suggest themselves. Book 3 is filled with reminiscences of scenes from Homer, Apollonius, and Euripides. Here too in this passage we have a deliberate literary reminiscence. As so often in the *Aeneid*, Virgil wishes to recall and compete with his illustrious predecessors, here Pindar and Lucretius, in describing one of nature's most stupendous spectacles. He knew by instinct what present-day critics know so well, that such reminiscences, when well done, set up reverberations in the reader's mind and make the passage in question catch up and benefit by the echoes of all other similar passages in literature.⁶ So far as I can see, there is little direct imitation either of Pindar or of Lucretius. In the case of Lucretius the vocabulary is often much the same but that is inevitable when two poets describe the same

phenomenon. But what one soon observes is how Virgil tones down the audio-visual effects in Lucretius. The earlier poet seems bent on matching the volcanic fireworks with his powerful verbal pyrotechnics. His main stress whenever he talks of volcanoes (e.g., 1. 722 ff., 6. 639 ff.), is on the fire that so mysteriously bursts from the ground and spreads havoc far and wide. So *flamma* is the word that, so to speak, lights the long fuse of *f*-words in Lucretius' imagination: *ferat flammai fulgura* (1. 725); *flamma foras...fornacibus efflet* (6. 681); *fert...favillam* (690); and so on to 700. There is, besides, much alliteration of *m*, *v*, and *t*. Such verbal effects give to Lucretius' lines an incomparable, rugged force which Virgil surely admired but did not care to imitate too extensively. Even as it was, his own lines were criticized by Favorinus as being too extravagant and flamboyant.

But Virgil's description is not simply a bravura passage designed to raise the tone of Book 3 to the grand style. It has also a symbolic value, like the storm which opens the *Aeneid*. Speaking of Virgil's landscape, Pöschl says: "Unlike Homer's, Virgil's landscape does not exist for its own sake. Nor is it all setting and background. Above all, it is symbolic of mood... We are almost always watching a two-fold event—an inner and an outer drama."⁷ A description may be called symbolic when it is drawn only in part for itself but chiefly for its overtone of judgment and a significance which transcends mere pictorial interest. It may well have been Pindar who suggested this symbolic use of Etna. For those terrible convulsions of nature were not merely natural happenings (as Lucretius would have it), but the work of the Titan Typhos (in Virgil Enceladus), who in his pride rebelled against Zeus and was now paying the price. In Pindar's great Ode, "Zeus becomes wholly identified with harmony, and the fires sent up from Aetna by Typhos... become the violence that cannot yield to calm."⁸ That sleepless night the Trojans were awed by the terrible

6. On the power of such mythical allusions, cf. N. Frye, *Fables in Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York, 1963), especially pp. 21 ff.

7. V. Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil*, trans. G. Seligson (Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 143.

8. J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 83. Italics mine.

sights and sounds: "noctem illam tecti silvis immania monstra / perferimus, nec quae sonitum det causa videmus" (583-84). If it is true that the basic theme of the *Aeneid* is the struggle and final victory of order over disruptive demonic forces (*furor* in all its forms), then the brief experiences of the Trojans in Sicily may be viewed as a prelude and preparation for their future struggles against *monstra* of all kinds, whether embodied in natural forces, such as storms, or in human beings moved by violence and *furor*. The next day they catch sight of another *monstrum* in the shape of Polyphemus, a kind of Titan in the flesh. This western world where they are to find a new home is not yet the idyllic land of the *laudes Italiae* in the *Georgics* (2. 136 ff.), but a land and a people to be tamed and won only after many stern conflicts: *tantae molis erat*. . .

Is there in the *Aeneid* any recurrent symbolic imagery to stress the main theme and at the same time to evoke and carry the appropriate emotion? So, for instance, in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, the storm or tempest is the dominant symbol for disorder and turbulence; in the *Iliad*, "fire is the one clearly imagistic motif which continues throughout the poem . . ."⁹ Heroic rage, valor, honor, and the like are all fire. In the *Aeneid* there is much storm imagery, but it does not pervade the entire poem. If there is a dominant symbol in the poem it is surely fire, destructive fire. In particular, wherever there is question of *furor*, unbridled passion, in a person, this symbol is likely to appear and reappear. So Dido's love, which soon turns to hatred, is fire: "at regina . . . caeco carpitur igni" (4. 1-2); "est mollis flamma medullas" (66); "uritur infelix Dido" (68). In *Aeneid* 2, there is much real, material fire which consumes Troy, and it awakens in Aeneas a responsive fire: at the sight of Troy in flames, "ardent animi; furor iraque mentem / praecipitat (2. 316-17). Above all, perhaps, Turnus seems all compact of fire: "his agitur furiis, totoque ardentis ab ore / scintillae absistunt, oculis micat acribus ignis" (12. 101-2). Scholars like Knox, Otis, and Putnam have drawn attention to the fire

imagery in certain parts of the *Aeneid*. But here I would like to stress a particular species of fire symbolism, namely volcanic fire, which Virgil employs to portray his most violent character. For of all species of fire in the world none is so awe-inspiring and so destructive as this. And if any character in the poem can be called "volcanic," it is surely Turnus.

By a volcanic character I mean one, like Lear's in Shakespeare, which habitually gives way to sudden, explosive violence; one which erupts in paroxysms of irrational, destructive rage. At times Aeneas gives way to fury, but usually he is well controlled and his fury is motivated. Dido is a fiery character, to be sure, but her outbursts are understandable, given her volatile temperament. And nowhere in the poem is either of these characters described in terms which make one think of a volcano, while Turnus is unmistakably so described.

Let us begin with the Allecto-Turnus scene in 7. 413 ff. Recall who and what Allecto is: "a symbol of the fury within the human heart that is ever ready, given the proper motivation, to burst into flame."¹⁰ She appears to the sleeping Turnus in the dark of the night. When he responds calmly and derisively to her words, she explodes in anger and hurls a fiery brand into his heart. A sudden tremor seizes him and he awakes in a frenzy: "arma amens fremit . . . saevit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli, / ira super" (460-62). Then there follows the simile of the boiling cauldron, a kind of miniature volcano, to describe the state of Turnus' mind. It is as though violent emotions seething deep in his unconscious now suddenly explode—and war results.

Toward the end of the same book (783-88), Turnus' helmet and shield are described: "Upon his tall, triple-crested helmet a Chimaera was rampant, breathing out volcanic fire from its jaws . . . The bloodier grew the battle, the more did that creature appear to roar and rage, to go berserk and shoot forth grim flames." The Chimaera is a creature of myth, shaped by the mythical imagination of primitive man to represent violent natural forces that mysteriously break out of the

9. C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 144 and all of chap. vii.

10. B. Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1963), p. 325.

earth.¹¹ It was said to be descended from Typhoeus who, according to Pindar and Aeschylus, was buried under Etna and ever after shot forth at times floods of volcanic fire. Standing as it does for irrational, purposeless violence, the Chimaera is a fitting emblem for the helmet of Virgil's most passionate character.

Nowhere perhaps is the volcanic nature of Turnus brought out more vividly than in the Hercules-Cacus episode in Book 8, provided one sees that this episode is not merely an exciting story but a symbolic foreshadowing of the later encounter between Aeneas and Turnus, and that a close comparison of the characteristics of Turnus with those of Cacus reveals striking resemblances.¹² Whatever Cacus may have been in the beginning, in Virgil he is fire-breathing half-man, half-beast, a son of Vulcan.¹³ When finally brought to bay in his cave (8. 252-58):

faucibus ingentem fumum (mirabile dictu)
evomit involvitque domum caligine caeca
prospectum eripiens oculis, glomeratque sub
antro
fumiferam noctem commixtis igne tenebris.

Here we have, along with distant echoes of the description of Etna's eruption in Book 3, another fire-breathing *monstrum* like the Chimaera, but now one clothed in quasi-human form. In the books to come, Virgil will parade before us another, fully humanized *monstrum* (but not a "monster") in the shape of Turnus, to excite our mingled awe and horror.¹⁴ But in these final books the poet does not so much portray Turnus in volcanic terms as show him time after time erupting into fits of violent passion, with disastrous consequences to many others and to himself in the end.

From the beginning of Book 9 Turnus is called *audax*. But in later books the words *violentia* and *ira(e)* will be applied to him

almost like standing epithets. As he confronts the Trojan camp whose gates are tightly closed, "ignescunt irae; duris dolor ossibus ardet" (66). Pöschl speaks of "the flaming crescendo in which the inner fire of the hero kindles the outer fire" with which he attempts to burn the Trojan fleet. As the book progresses we see, along with his impetuous courage and *élan*, a *furor* which blinds him to the reality of things. Hence his failure to see in the miracle of the boats, changed into nymphs of the sea, the hand of fate against him. Later, when he gains entrance into the Trojan camp (756 ff.), he fails to open the gates for his followers. If he had done that, says Virgil, it would have been the end for the Trojans: "sed furor ardentem caedisque insana cupido / egit in adversos" (760-61).

This impression of a blinding delusion of mind which sweeps him on is deepened in Book 10. After the death of Pallas at Turnus' hands, Virgil makes one of his rare editorial comments to highlight the scene: "nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae / et servare modum rebus sublata secundis!" (501-2). In the last two books, Virgil makes abundantly clear how needless the war was. It was not willed by Jupiter (10. 8-9), by Aeneas (11. 110 ff.), or by Latinus (7. 595 ff.), but solely by Turnus. At the words of Drances, who, despite his personal hostility, speaks much bitter truth, Turnus explodes in anger: "talibus exarsit dictis violentia Turni" (376). In the final book, Turnus is shown as both heroic and gripped by *furor*, a great fighter indeed but one who has learned little from his previous mistakes. Like a wounded lion at bay, whose spirit mounts with the danger, "haud secus accenso gliscit violentia Turno" (9). He will have none of Latinus' conciliatory advice but, returning to his quarters from the palace, makes frantic efforts to rouse his martial spirit to the burning point (95 ff.). And now

11. See S. G. P. Small, "The Arms of Turnus: *Aeneid* 7. 783-92," *TAPA*, XC (1959), 243 ff., for a good study of the Chimaera.

12. The symbolic meaning of this episode has recently been studied by G. K. Galinsky, "The Hercules-Cacus Episode in *Aeneid* VIII," *AJP*, LXXXVII (1966), 18 ff.

13. The mysterious origins of both Turnus and Cacus are well treated by Galinsky, *op. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 36 ff.

14. The word *monstrum* in Latin (from *monet*) means properly something which "warns," a portent or something outside the norm of ordinary nature which arouses awe and often dread and horror (in *Macbeth* Shakespeare uses the word "strange" to stress the disruption of natural order). Virgil uses the word twenty-six times in the *Aeneid*.

the poet describes him in vivid terms which all but make him out to be a fire-breathing creature: "his agitur furiis, totoque ardentis ab ore / scintillae absistunt, oculis micat acribus ignis" (101–2). When the truce is broken and the wounded Aeneas retires from the field, Turnus is suddenly fired with new hope ("subita spe fervidus ardet"), calls for his arms, and plunges madly into another orgy of unnecessary killing. At last, when the final showdown comes, his nobler nature asserts itself. He wrenches himself free from his self-protective illusions and goes to meet Aeneas. When he falls, his few last sad words tell us

15. *Inferno*, Canto 1, 106–8.

that now the volcanic fire within him is all spent: "equidem merui nec deprecor" (931).

Turnus, like Achilles, is surely a memorable artistic creation, whatever one may think of his moral character. Like a volcano in the physical world, he seldom fails to inspire a certain awe in the reader. It is little wonder that Dante, recalling those old, unhappy, far-off days when men battled and died for Italy, writes feelingly: "Di quella . . . Italia . . . per cui morì la vergine Cammilla, Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute."¹⁵

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AGAMEMNON 1446–47

ἄτιμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην
ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην
τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόνον
κεῖται φιλήτωρ τοῦδ', ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπήγαγεν
†εὐνῆς† παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς
[Ag. 1443–47, Fraenkel].

1445

It is with these lines that Clytemnestra's final trimeters in the epirrhematic composition of 1407–1576 conclude. In addition to Wecklein's *Appendix* and Dawe's *Repertory of Conjectures on Aeschylus* (Leyden, 1965), the commentaries of Headlam-Thomson, Fraenkel, Denniston-Page, *et al.*, reveal how much energy and ingenuity have been expended in attempts to clarify the text. The two basic problems are the subject of ἐπήγαγεν and the sense of the double genitives εὐνῆς and χλιδῆς. Commentators have been divided on the question whether Agamemnon (e.g., Heath, Campbell, Stanley, Wilamowitz) or Cassandra (e.g., Schütz, Verrall, Headlam, Fraenkel) is the subject of the verb, and, as Denniston-Page comment, "the latter is favoured by the run of the words, the former by the sense." Headlam, adopting Auratus' χλιδῆν, believed that "the phrase εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς is not accusative and object of ἐπήγαγεν, but nominative and subject of it—or better, perhaps, it is in apposition to the previous nominative ἡ δὲ τοι." Denniston-Page believe the corruption is in παροψώνημα (Casaubon's correction of the παροψόνημα of the MSS.)

and rewrite the line εὐνῆς πάροψον, ὅμμα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς. I concur, however, with Fraenkel's opinion "that παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς must be taken together, and that the genitive must on no account be altered." The fault lies in εὐνῆς and is one of sense rather than grammar. Fraenkel draws attention to Wilamowitz's excellent discussion of this double genitive construction at Eur. *H.F.* 170 and believes that "εὐνῆς may have crept in as an undiscerning gloss on χλιδῆς and displaced the original word. Perhaps this was an adjectival attribute to παροψώνημα; but a word of some quite different kind is also conceivable." But while the construction of εὐνῆς may be sound, its meaning is not satisfactory, and editors and translators alike have had to resort to elaborate paraphrases to render the passage. The dramatic context, as well as its position at the close of the trimeters, seem to call for a direct statement, however terse, and such is not offered by the present text.

Much of the difficulty comes from the editors' and commentators' assumption that either Agamemnon or Cassandra is the subject of ἐπήγαγεν and can be eliminated if H. Voss's εὐνή is read in place of the troublesome genitive. This conjecture, recorded in Wecklein's *Appendix*, deserves further attention than it has hitherto received and satisfies requirements of both grammar and sense. The particular meaning of the word would be *lectus*