

XIX. The Arms of Turnus: *Aeneid* 7.783-92

STUART G. P. SMALL

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

It is generally recognized by students of classical epic that passages describing the external appearance of individuals often afford a valuable insight into character and motivation. This is especially true of descriptions of arms and accoutrements. The tower-like shield of Ajax, Achilles' Pelian spear, and the leopard skin that Paris wears across his shoulders tell us something about the personality of each of these heroes. By the same token a study of Vergil's description of the arms and blazons of Turnus should lead to a better understanding of his role in the *Aeneid*.¹

The most elaborate description of Turnus' arms occurs in *Aeneid* 7.783-92. The passage runs as follows:²

Ipse inter primos praestanti corpore Turnus
vertitur arma tenens et toto vertice supra est;
cui triplici crinita iuba galea alta Chimaeram
sustinet, Aetnaeos efflantem faucibus ignis;
tam magis illa fremens et tristibus effera flammis,
quam magis effuso crudescunt sanguine pugnae.
at levem clipeum sublatis cornibus Io
auro insignibat, iam saetis obsita, iam bos
(argumentum ingens), et custos virginis Argus
caelataque amnem fundens pater Inachus urna.³

¹ The best general discussions of the character of Turnus are the following: V. Pöschl, *Die Dichtkunst Virgils* (Vienna 1950) 153 ff.; C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London 1948) 44 ff.; R. Heinze, *Virgils Epische Technik*³ (Leipzig 1928) 171-238; W. Warde Fowler, *The Death of Turnus* (Oxford 1919); W. Warde Fowler, *Virgil's Gathering of the Clans* (Oxford 1916); K. Büchner *RE* 8A (1955) 1399 ff.; W. Ehlers *RE* 7A (1943) 1409 ff. The following articles are also useful: G. E. Duckworth, "Turnus as a Tragic Character," *Vergilius* (1940) 5 ff.; E. L. Highbarger, "The Tragedy of Turnus," *CW* 41 (1947-48) 114 ff.; J. B. Garstang, "The Tragedy of Turnus," *Phoenix* 4 (1950) 47 ff.; R. M. Boltwood, "Turnus and Satan," *CJ* 47 (1951-52) 183 ff.

² Here and throughout this article Vergil is quoted from the text of R. Sabbadini (Rome 1930).

³ So far as I am aware, this passage has not heretofore been scrutinized in detail. There are a few helpful comments on it in Pöschl (above, note 1) 163 ff.; Heinze (above, note 1) 398, note; and W. Warde Fowler, *Virgil's Gathering of the Clans* (Oxford 1916) 82 ff.

Here we are told that Turnus' heraldic devices are the Chimaera and a golden image of Io transformed into a heifer. Perhaps Turnus chose these devices in order to make himself seem more impressive and formidable, or it may be that he had inherited the helmet and shield along with his sword (12.88–91) from his father Daunus. In either case the mythological implications of the devices Turnus wears help the reader to understand this hero better than he understands himself.

Let us begin with the Chimaera.⁴ The Chimaera is one of a large group of monsters known to mythology, most of which are theriomorphic in whole or in part and combine the shapes of two or more animals. They are largely of eastern origin. The group includes such fabulous creatures as Scylla, the Centaurs and Gryphons, the Gorgons and Harpies, the Giants and many more. Some of the monsters seem to be personifications of the violent forces of nature. Most of them are associated with the primitive, the archaic and the anarchic. Hesiod (*Theog.* 306–32) makes many of them descendants, in an early generation, of Typhaon, god of volcanic eruptions, and Echidna, a chthonic serpent. The monsters are particularly at home in certain undeveloped or barbaric or imperfectly civilized regions, such as Asia or the far north or remote Spain.⁵ Most of them are inclined to irrational and purposeless violence and are therefore enemies of mankind and of the Olympian gods. As the universe gradually rises out of aboriginal disorder and brutality into cosmos and peace, they are eventually defeated in conflicts with various mighty civilizing heroes. After their defeat they are relegated to the underworld.

Many of these generalizations apply specifically to the Chimaera and therefore, by a natural extension, to Turnus, whose chosen emblem she is. As the Chimaera dwells in Caria or Lycia, far from the principal centers of Mediterranean civilization, so likewise does Turnus live in the heart of Vergil's primitive Italy, a

⁴ For the details of the Chimaera myth I have relied principally upon the account in L. Preller and C. Robert, *Griechische Mythologie*⁴ 2.1 (Berlin 1920) 179 ff. See also Anne Roes, "The Representation of the Chimaera," *JHS* 54 (1934) 21 ff.; P. Amandry, "Pyrrhoos Chimaira," *Mélanges Charles Picard* (Paris 1949) 6 ff. On the monsters in general consult H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*² (London 1933) 31 ff. There is a striking discussion of the "daemonic" aspect of the monsters in P. Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* (New York 1936) 77 ff.

⁵ Aeschylus, in his description of Io's wanderings (*PV* 786–818), locates a whole series of monsters, including Gorgons, the Gryphons, and the Graeae, in the plains of central Asia. The most familiar Spanish monster is the *tricornor* Geryon.

land which, whatever its promise for the future, is as yet at a comparatively unevolved and barbarous stage of development.⁶ As the Chimaera is given to purposeless violence, so Turnus as a man of violence irrationally loves war for its own sake.⁷ The description of the helmet hints at this characteristic (7.787–88):

tam magis illa fremens et tristibus effera flammis
quam magis effuso crudescent sanguine pugnae.

Again, like the Chimaera Turnus is an “archaic” creature, that is, a member of an obsolescent breed marked out for ultimate destruction in an evolving universe.⁸ Lastly, as the Chimaera is finally slain by the stainless hero Bellerophon with the assistance of Athena and the divine Pegasus, so too will Turnus be destroyed by Aeneas with the help of Venus and other deities. Therefore the Chimaera emblem which Turnus chooses for himself without realizing the full meaning of his choice ironically reveals his innermost deficiencies and foreshadows his ultimate doom.

There is another aspect of the mythology of the Chimaera that may fittingly be mentioned here. The Chimaera is persistently chthonic. At every point in the story she is identified, in one way or another, with the powers under the earth. This is most obvious after her defeat by Bellerophon, when she becomes one of the vain terrors lurking near the Tree of Dreams on the outskirts of the underworld (6.288–89):

. . . flammisque armata Chimaera,
Gorgones Harpyiaeque et forma tricornis umbrae.

But even before Bellerophon defeated her, she was a subterranean power. The myth of the Chimaera originated as an explanation of volcanic activity beneath the soil of Lycia.⁹ Vergil must have

⁶ It is noteworthy that the more civilized elements in Italy (e.g. Evander's Arcadians and Tarchon's Etruscans) ally themselves with Aeneas, whereas the more barbarous (e.g. Mezentius, Camilla) side with Turnus. The mild Latinus wishes to accept Aeneas as his son-in-law, but he is unable to enforce his will upon Turnus and Queen Amata. Notice also the predominance of rustic outlanders in the catalogue of Turnus' forces (7.641–817) and the quasi-barbarous character of Turnus' brother-in-law and close associate Remulus (9.590–637).

⁷ Cf. Duckworth (above, note 1) 7: “His most outstanding characteristic is *violentia*, as *pietas* is that of Aeneas”; see also E. Adelaide Hahn, “*Pietas* versus *Violentia* in the *Aeneid*,” *CW* 25 (1931–32) 9 ff., 17 ff. On Turnus' love of war for its own sake see Stuart G. P. Small, “Virgil, Dante, and Camilla,” *CJ* 54 (1959) 298.

⁸ The “archaic” quality of Turnus' heroism is discussed by Bowra (above, note 1) 49, 56; and Pöschl (above, note 1) 88 f., 193 f.

⁹ Servius on 6.288; Pliny *HN* 2.110. See also L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*² (Berlin 1861) 2.83; Amandry (above, note 4) 6.

been aware of the connection between the mythical Chimaera and the actual volcano of the same name. This is indicated by the epithet which he applies to her fiery breath in a phrase from the passage under discussion (786):

... *Aetnaeos* efflantem faucibus ignes.

The flames of the Chimaera are as terrible as the chthonic fire which bursts from the greatest of all Italian volcanoes, Aetna itself.

That Turnus, too, is associated with the powers under the earth is clearly shown in more ways than one. In the first place, he wears as his emblem a representation of the Chimaera, which, as has just been indicated, is essentially a chthonic beast. Secondly, we learn from a passage in Book 12 (90-91) that the sword which he inherited from his father Daunus was tempered in the waters of the Styx:

... Dauno ignipotens deus ipse parenti
fecerat et Stygia candentem tinxerat unda.

Furthermore, Turnus' wrath against Aeneas was originally implanted in his heart by the hell-Fury Allecto (7.406-74), who had flung a fiery torch into his bosom as he slept,¹⁰ thus invading his inmost personality and transforming the apparently controlled and rational young prince into a dangerous madman. Likewise the epithet *Aetnaeos*, which was cited in the preceding paragraph as proving Vergil's awareness of the volcanic origin of the Chimaera myth, also makes interesting implications concerning the character of Turnus. The word functions as a kind of double metaphor. In telling us that Turnus' helmet erupts streams of "Aetnaean flames," Vergil means in bald prose that the bronze helmet flashed in such a way that the beholder might fancy the image of the Chimaera to be breathing forth flames as intense as those of Aetna.¹¹ But at the connotative level the adjective *Aetnaeos* sets up a three-way comparison involving not only Turnus and the Chimaera but also the fire-breathing Titan Enceladus

¹⁰ It is important to notice that Allecto attacks Turnus as he lies sleeping; that is, at a time when the conscious, rational and moral self is dormant. The Fury takes advantage of this opportunity to invade and take over the preconscious depths of Turnus' personality. Thenceforward compulsive wrath and uncontrolled desire (in ancient terminology, *violentia* and *impotentia*) dominate Turnus' actions and words almost completely.

¹¹ Cf. the note (based on Servius) in Heyne-Wagner,³ *ad loc.*

(or Typhon), pinned under Mt. Aetna by Jupiter. Traditionally the eruptions of Aetna were caused by Enceladus' struggles to dislodge the weight of the mountain from his body. To Vergil as to Aeschylus and Pindar before him, the activity of this volcano seemed to be an archetypal instance of violent but ineffectual rebellion against cosmic order.¹² Turnus is this kind of rebel. In opposing the decrees of destiny and in vainly striving to block the fulfillment of Jupiter's purposes, he identifies with the forces making for anarchy in the universe. In this sense he is on the side of the chthonic powers and comparable to both Enceladus and the Chimaera; as they breathe forth literal fire,¹³ so he is appropriately represented as erupting metaphorical flames. Fire indeed appears to be Turnus' natural element. As Pöschl has shown, the Rutulian prince is surrounded and accompanied by blazing flame throughout the second half of the *Aeneid*, both in the imagery and in the action.¹⁴ In some passages this seems to equate him with the "fiery" heroes of the *Iliad*.¹⁵ But more often Vergil chooses to emphasize the infernal aspects of Turnus' fire. Such is the case in the present passage: ultimately this fire has been implanted in him by the Fury, and therefore (by the associative logic of Vergilian imagery) it bursts forth like the lava streams that erupt from the breast of Enceladus or like the flame that breathes from the heart of the Chimaera.

It is now time to consider the strange physical makeup of the Chimaera. Vergil probably expected us to visualize this monster as she is represented in the celebrated bronze statue from Arezzo;¹⁶

¹² See Vergil's extended description of Aetna in eruption at 3.570-87, where the fire, smoke and lava which pour from the mountain seem to commit an act of aggression against the order and beauty of the starry heavens. The passage is presumably modelled on Aeschylus, *PV* 353-74, and Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.20.

¹³ It is interesting to note in passing that another fire-breathing monster, the cave-dwelling Cacus, who is the analogue of Turnus in the parable-myth recounted to Aeneas by Evander in 8.185-275, is also a chthonic figure with obviously "volcanic" connotations.

¹⁴ Pöschl (above, note 1) 174 ff. Much has been written recently about the recurrent image of fire in the *Aeneid*; see especially B. M. W. Knox, "The Serpent and the Flame," *AJP* 71 (1950) 379 ff.; B. Fenik, "Parallelism of Theme and Imagery in *Aeneid* II and IV," *AJP* 80 (1959) 12 ff.; Francis L. Newton, "Recurrent Imagery in *Aeneid* IV," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 39 ff.

¹⁵ On fire as a major symbol of the *aretê* of Homeric warriors see C. Whitman, *Homer and the Homeric Tradition* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1958) 128 ff.

¹⁶ Excellent photographs of this bronze (now in Florence) may be seen in L. Goldscheider, *Etruscan Sculpture* (London 1941), plates 95-7.

that is, as a lion with a wild goat's head rising out of its back and a serpent for a tail. The dominant impression produced by this peculiar combination of forms is one of illogical and disorganized heterogeneity.¹⁷ It is characteristic of the Chimaera that it is several things at once, all of them dangerous, destructive and negative; its component parts get into one another's way and fail to add up to a rationally unified whole. Turnus, too, is an irrational combination of violence, contradiction and negation; the heterogeneity of the Chimaera corresponds only too closely to a certain fundamental disorganization and want of coherence in his character and motivation. This is apparent in the shifting, not to say contradictory, reasons he gives for opposing Aeneas and the Trojans. Sometimes in addressing his troops he claims to be defending the fatherland against foreign aggression (7.469-578; 10.280-81); but on other occasions he reveals more personal motives, namely, his desire to retain his promised bride and to succeed Latinus as ruler of Latium (9.138; 12.80). However, on the field of battle, especially when he is engaging inferior opponents, Lavinia and the quest for royal power are forgotten, and he seems to fight out of a sheer love of fighting or out of a desire to win spoils and prove his claim to honor and glory (11.486-97; 12.331-45; 10.495-505; 12.49). Later when it becomes clear that he must eventually face the formidable Aeneas in single combat, love of battle gives way in turn to an anxious wish to prove that he is not a coward (11.383-98; 12.644-49) and that he can live up to the code of honor of his heroic ancestors (11.415-44; 12.646-49); he hopes that even if he is beaten he will be able to snatch glory from defeat by sacrificing himself in order to spare the lives of his comrades-in-arms (11.440-42; 12.693-95). Turnus is never altogether clear in his own mind as to what he is trying to accomplish in the long run or why. As the epic draws to a close, his bewilderment seems to increase. It approaches a maximum in the splendid lines describing the rip-tide of conflicting emotions in which he flounders just before summoning up strength to confront Aeneas in the final duel (12.665-68):

¹⁷ The inorganic form of the Chimaera is discussed more fully in Rose (above, note 4) 21 ff. Vergil persistently describes the powers of evil in images of multiplicity, indeterminacy and heterogeneity; see, for example, 4.173-88 (Fama); 5.606-10 (Iris); 7.346-58 and 445-51 (Allecto); 8.698 (Egyptian deities); and 10.565-70 (Aegaeon).

Obstipuit varia confusus imagine rerum
 Turnus et obtutu tacito stetit: aestuat ingens
 uno in corde pudor mixtoque insania luctu
 et furiis agitatus amor et conscia virtus.

A few lines later he is obliged to admit to his sister Juturna that his present course of action is essentially inexplicable and irrational and yet somehow inescapable. He confesses that his opposition to Aeneas is really *furor*, a form of madness (12.680):

. . . hunc, oro, sine me furere . . . furorem.

In the end he finds that he cannot give a coherent account of his conduct. The reason for this is that from the beginning the driving force behind his actions and words has been the fire of *Allecto*. Under the influence of *Juno* and the *Fury*, Turnus' personality has undergone a terrible transformation; it has become a force making for evil, as disorganized, divided and (in terms of Vergil's theology) unnatural as the image of the monstrous *Chimaera* upon his helmet.

It remains to consider Turnus' second heraldic device, the golden image of *Io* which adorns his shield. We can readily understand why Turnus has chosen this emblem. Vergil mentions at 7.371-72 that Turnus is himself a descendant of *Inachus*, the father of *Io*. Turnus has therefore adopted this blazon in order to advertise his distinguished pedigree. The *Io* emblem also lends some color to his claim to be a continuator of the old Greek tradition in Italy.¹⁸ Turnus thinks of himself as a kind of second *Achilles* (9.742) and confidently expects that the fighting in Italy is to be simply a re-enactment of the Trojan war, with himself and his armies victorious (9.136-55). The Rutulian's claim turns out to be partly admissible though not in the sense he intended. Turnus really is the same sort of warrior as many of the Greeks who fought before Troy, *Achilles* included; but by Vergil's scale of values this means that he is the kind of hero that is no longer good enough. On the other hand, Turnus' hope that the fighting in Italy will be a mere repetition of the Trojan War is wide of the mark. The Italian experience reverses the experience

¹⁸ Conington-Nettleship,³ commenting on 7.789, remark, "Io was chosen on account of Turnus' connexion with Argos, as if he was the representative of Greece in Italy."

at Troy; this time the Trojans win and deserve to win.¹⁹ Aeneas, Turnus' Trojan adversary, has been transformed by adversity into a far greater figure than any Trojan of the past; in fact, as the predestinated founder of a new order he is a much more impressive hero than Achilles himself.²⁰ Thus the golden emblem of Io which symbolizes Turnus' claim to superiority and victory ironically reveals his inferiority and foreshadows his defeat: the winner is the hero whose shield bears emblems not of archaic antiquity but of a glorious Roman future.²¹

From another point of view it must be admitted that the Io emblem gives the reader a much more favorable impression of Turnus' character than does the fire-breathing Chimaera. The Chimaera is bestial and monstrous from first to last, whereas Io is a human being who has been transformed into the shape of a heifer; even after the alteration of her outward shape she retains her human mind and soul. This is true of Turnus as well. For all his violence and unreason he is never dehumanized altogether. Likewise both Io and Turnus are victims of divine interference. Io, we recall, was first "animalized" by Jupiter's lust and then tormented by the jealousy and spite of Juno, who plagued her with the sleepless watchman Argus and thereafter drove her mad by sending a tormenting gadfly in pursuit of her.²² Io's Italian descendant undergoes a similar experience at Juno's hands. He

¹⁹ This point, a fundamental one for the interpretation of the second half of the *Aeneid*, has been studied by R. W. B. Lewis, "Homer and Virgil: the Double Themes," *Furioso* 5 (1950) 47 ff.; and more fully by William Anderson in his excellent article "Virgil's Second *Iliad*," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 17 ff.

²⁰ This superiority is nowhere more clearly marked than in Vergil's description of the *ménis* of Aeneas in 10.510-832. This wrath, provoked by a cause similar to that which aroused Achilles' wrath against Hector (death of Pallas=death of Patroclus), is fully as terrible as Achilles'; when it is at its height, Aeneas is compared in a remarkable simile (10.565-70) to the hundred-armed and fifty-headed Aegaeon, a fire-breathing monster who had rebelled against the authority of Jupiter (cf. 567). But Aeneas' wrath is of much shorter duration than Achilles', being impressively arrested and controlled by the hero himself (after the death of Lausus) before it dooms Aeneas, his cause and the armies of the enemy to disaster.

²¹ For Aeneas' shield see 8.626-731. The contrast in personality between the two heroes is also reflected in Vergil's description of the helmets worn by each. Aeneas' helmet (10.270-75) streams heavenly fire (the blaze of Sirius or a comet), whereas Turnus' helmet erupts "Aetnaean" flames. The one is obviously appropriate to the servant of Jupiter, the other to the victim of the Fury.

²² For the details of the Io legend see L. Preller and C. Robert (above, note 4) 2.1.253 ff.; and R. D. Murray, *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus' Suppliants* (Princeton 1958), esp. chapters 3 and 4.

too is driven mad by the goddess; for it is Juno who, in furtherance of her own designs, sees to it that Turnus is visited in his sleep by the Fury.²³ To Juno, Turnus (like Dido before him) is little more than a pawn in her conflict with Jupiter over the future of Italy, a conflict motivated by a series of absurdly petty resentments and an unreasoning preference of Carthage over Rome (1.19–32). In Turnus' case as in Io's, human suffering results as a by-product of a discreditable conflict between Juno and Jupiter.

Yet as the second half of the *Aeneid* unfolds, the reader becomes increasingly aware of certain fundamental differences between the experience of Io and that of Turnus. Io is the more sinned-against in the beginning, but in the end the more fortunate. At all points she is an innocent victim. She does no one any harm. The unevolved Jupiter who is the prime cause of her sufferings is a merciless and conscienceless tyrant. Yet her pain eventually leads to great good, both for herself and for others. After she has wandered over the face of the earth for many years, Jupiter, transcending his earlier raw cruelty and lust, releases her from the torment of Juno's gadfly and restores her to human form. Then solely by the miraculous touch of his hand, he gives her a son Epaphus who founds a civilized society by the banks of the Nile. Through Epaphus, Io becomes the ancestress of a glorious line of kings and heroes in Phoenicia, Cilicia, Thebes and Argos. So the heroine who begins as a pitiable victim of divine brutality becomes the means whereby a splendid future is made possible for an important segment of the human race.

Turnus' story is very different. Though equally a victim, he is far from harmless. He is transformed into an instrument of destruction. He causes tremendous suffering and loss as the principal human abettor of a war which Jupiter has forbidden and which he regards as basically impious.²⁴ The evolved Jupiter whose will he opposes is no tyrant but a wise and just god. Furthermore, his sufferings bring him few compensations, if any.

²³ Juno does not tell Allecto explicitly to drive Turnus mad; she simply releases her with the general instruction *dissice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli* (7.339). Allecto at once selects the susceptible Turnus (along with Queen Amata and the Italian peasantry) to be her victim and agent. But Juno undoubtedly foreknows that this will happen. Turnus is as truly *chosen* by Juno as Aeneas is chosen by Jupiter.

²⁴ See 10.6–15, and compare 7.583–600. One reason for the impiety of the conflict is that it is a kind of civil war by anticipation, since the adversaries are destined in the end to form a single people.

The scourge of Fury-sent madness is never lifted from him, unless perhaps at the very end of his life when it is too late. He is not permitted to have his Lavinia, to survive and reproduce his kind; his death leads to the extinction of his line. The torment of his closing days on earth is barren. It only lays bare the fact that he is basically unworthy to participate in the new order of life in Italy. He lives just long enough to discover the shattering truth that all along he has been no more than an impediment to the making of a better world and that as such he is the enemy of Jupiter.²⁵ The discrepancies between the fate of Turnus and that of his great ancestress are so striking that they make a mockery of the claims implied by his wearing the image of Io upon his shield.

In summing up it must be said that Vergil's description of the arms and blazons of Turnus is much more than an accumulation of picturesque and ornamental detail. It is the symbolic figuration of a heroic and fated career.²⁶ Both emblems are chosen by Turnus and are willingly, even gladly, worn by him for they express his own conception of his power and strength and heroic worth. But he does not fully understand what they signify. He does not know that they foreshadow the terrible end that lies in store for him, nor does he realize that they condemn him for his unsuspected deficiencies. All the pathos of Turnus' human fallibility and vulnerability, therefore, is contained *in nucleo* in these few lines. The blazons he wears in simple pride constantly belie Aeneas' last antagonist's claim to heroic greatness. They do more than this: they deny that he has any final value in Jupiter's eyes; they deny even his right to live. The man who thought himself a second Achilles is the victim of a goddess' cruelty, of his own inadequacy and of the inexorable march of history.

²⁵ The moment of discovery comes at 12.894-95: *non me tua fervida terrent / dicta, ferox: di me terrent et Iuppiter hostis*. See Warde Fowler's valuable comment on these lines in *The Death of Turnus* (Oxford 1919) 152-53.

²⁶ That Turnus is fated is shown not only by the weighing of his *fatum* in 12.725-27 but also by Jupiter's sending out one of the Dirae against him in 12.845-68; the Dirae are here equivalent to the Erinnyes who are the executors of Fate's decrees. Turnus' earlier boast, *sunt et mea contra / fata mihi* (9.136-37), is thus ironically fulfilled.