

**scripta 14.2: Aeneas kills Turnus**

The Aeneid ends with a duel between Aeneas and Turnus, the leader of the Italian forces and Aeneas' rival for marriage to Lavinia, daughter of the king of the Latin people. Aeneas kills Turnus, and the moment is used by Virgil to symbolise the first step towards the foundation of Rome.

Virgil's description conveys the conflicting passions of battle: Turnus asks for mercy, appealing to Aeneas' empathy for the grief Daunus, Turnus' father, will feel if his son dies before him. Aeneas hesitates and seems ready to spare Turnus, but then notices that Turnus is wearing armour taken from Pallas, a young soldier previously killed in battle. Pallas' father, king Evander, had agreed to supply troops to Aeneas and he had asked Aeneas to look after Pallas, his only son. When Aeneas sees Pallas' armour he is reminded of his - and Evander's - grief; ablaze with anger, pain and rage, Aeneas kills Turnus. The Aeneid is in many ways a celebration of the greatness of Rome but Virgil is alert to its cost: the final lines of the poem end in a frenzy of pain and with the darkness of death.

The Aeneid builds on the foundations of the epic tradition and Virgil often echoes moments from Homer's great epics. These echoes add depth to the poem, sometimes by reminding us of contrasting scenes. Turnus' appeal for empathy is very similar to the famous scene at the end of the Iliad, where Priam appeals to Achilles for compassion. In the Iliad, Achilles is moved by the sight of a father's grief and the Iliad ends with a moment of restorative understanding; with this scene in the background, Aeneas' descent into savage revenge at the end of the Aeneid becomes more strikingly bleak.

Turnus was on the ground and, as a suppliant, directing his gaze and stretching out his begging right hand he said, 'Indeed I have deserved to die and I do not ask you not to kill me for my sake; the outcome is yours to use. But if any thought for a wretched father is able to affect you, have pity for Daunus' old age (Anchises was also once such a father for you), I beg you, and give me back to my family - or, if you prefer my body to be stripped of its life, then give them back my corpse. You have won and the Ausonians have seen me, beaten, stretching out my hands to you. Lavinia is yours as your wife; don't go any further in your hatred.'

Aeneas stood in his armour ready to strike, but he was running his eyes over Turnus and he held back his own right hand, and now, now, as he hesitated more, Turnus' speech had begun to change his mind; but then he noticed the ill-omened strap on Turnus' tall shoulder and the sword-belt with its familiar studs glittered, once owned by the young boy, Pallas. Turnus had wounded Pallas, overpowered him and struck him down and now he was wearing his enemy's insignia on his shoulders.

Aeneas soaked up with his eyes the reminders and remnants of his wild grief and then, inflamed with fury and terrible in his anger, he said, 'Are you to be taken away from me, from here, dressed in the spoils of my people? Pallas kills you with this wound - it is Pallas who does it - and he exacts your punishment from your polluted blood.'

As he said this, Turnus' chest was in front of him and Aeneas plunged his sword into it, wild with emotion. Turnus' limbs grew limp with the chill of death and his spirit - aggrieved - fled with a groan down into the darkness.



- 1) What does Turnus do and say to try and persuade Aeneas to spare him?
- 2) Describe in your own words what happens after Turnus' speech: why does Aeneas pause and what does he see that reawakens his anger at Turnus?
- 3) List the different emotions which Aeneas has in this passage and explain why he feels each one.
- 4) The *Aeneid* ends here: do you think this is a good ending for a book or not? Why?