Robert W. Cape, Jr.
Austin College
rcape@austincollege.edu

Teaching the Perfect Storm(s) in Latin Literature (*Aeneid* 1.81ff. and *Bellum Gallicum* 4.28f.)

1. Caesar *BG* 4.28

His rebus pace confirmata, post diem quartum quam est in Britanniam ventum naves XVIII, de quibus supra demonstratum est, quae equites sustulerant, ex superiore portu leni vento solverunt. quae cum appropinquarent Britanniae et ex castris viderentur, tanta tempestas subito coorta est ut nulla earum cursum tenere posset, sed aliae eodem unde erant profectae referrentur, aliae ad inferiorem partem insulae, quae est propius solis occasum, magno suo cum periculo deicerentur; quae tamen ancoris iactis cum fluctibus complerentur, necessario adversa nocte in altum provectae continentem petierunt.
[29] Eadem nocte accidit ut esset luna plena, qui dies a maritimos aestus maximos in Oceano efficere consuevit, nostrisque id erat incognitum. ita uno tempore et longas naves, quibus exercitum transportandum curaverat, quasque Caesar in aridum subduxerat, aestus compleverat, et onerarias, quae ad ancoras erant deligatae, tempestas adflictabat, neque ulla nostris facultas aut administrandi aut auxiliandi dabatur. compluribus navibus fractis, reliquae cum essent funibus, ancoris reliquisque armamentis amissis ad navigandum inutiles, magna, id quod necesse erat accidere, totius exercitus perturbatio facta est. neque enim naves erant aliae quibus reportari possent, et omnia deerant quae ad reficiendas naves erant usui, et, quod omnibus constabat hiemari in Gallia oportere, frumentum in his locis in hiemem provisum non erat.

2. Cicero *Ep. ad Q. frat.* 20.4 (2.16[15].4)

Venio nunc ad id quod nescio an primum esse debuerit. o iucundas mihi tuas de Britannia litteras! timebam Oceanum, timebam litus insulae; reliqua non equidem contemno, sed plus habent tamen spei quam timoris magisque sum sollicitatus exspectatione ea quam metu. te vero ὑπόθεσιν scribendi egregiam habere video. quos tu situs, quas naturas rerum et locorum, quos mores, quas gentis, quas pugnas, quem vero ipsum imperatorem habes! ego te libenter, ut rogas, quibus rebus vis, adiuvabo et tibi versus quos rogas, hoc est Athenas noctuam, mittam.

I come now to that which I suppose ought to have been first. Oh, what a pleasure your letters about Britain were to me! I feared the Ocean! I feared the island shore! The other things I don't dismiss, but they show more hope than fear, and I am anxious with anticipation rather than apprehension. I see you've got an exceptional thesis for your writing. What places you have! What natural qualities of the situations and the locations! What customs, peoples, battles, and, indeed, what a *general* you have!

3. Practical considerations for students to address, moving from experiential to symbolic:
I.   Does the element seem "natural" to the story and the storyline?
            a. Is it an accidental occurrence? (if so, why include it?)
            b. Does it carry more meaning or become symbolic in some way?
II.   Does the element relate to an event the reader knows from direct experience?
            a. Is it convincing as an event? (verisimilitude)
            b. Is it more/less dramatic than a "normal" event? How might that be significant?
III.   Does the element relate to similar events the reader has encountered indirectly, through
            a. general use of everyday language and images? (easy metaphor)
            b. more artistic uses in literature or art?
                    i.   Does it relate to a type or class of experience?
                    ii. Does it invite comparison to another text in some way?
IV.   Is the element symbolic of some larger issue? Is it an allegory? These have implications for the larger story.

4. Some possible answers to some of these questions might take the following form:
  I.   Vergil's storm appears at a natural place in the storyline—initial travel sequence
        a.   Is not accidental—directly caused by the gods. Introduces greater significance of the event (compare to Caesar's high tide, ho hum causality)
        b.   Fulfills Vergil's earlier mention of Juno's wrath (1.11); allows first view of Aeneas as a leader (1.92ff.), etc
  II.   Storms are an experience common to most readers (even if not storms at sea)
        a.   It is convincingly dark & chaotic, but also overdone (waves rising to the sky then revealing the seabed, 1.103, 107), etc.
        b.   Yes, more dramatic, perhaps to show how Aeneas had to endure more and worse trials to establish Rome (*tot labores*, 1.10; *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*, 1.33), etc.
  III. Storms are a common metaphor and some famous ones also appear in literature
        a.   Tempestuous relationships, military and political; ship of state metaphor
        b.   *Odyssey* 5; Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*; Scipio & others at Carthage
              i.   Storms are very common in classical literature, a trope with expected elements, commonly used to show a general's character
              ii. Homer has different origins and source of help for the storm, different outcome, placed it in a different part of his book, etc.; Naevius may have placed it in a different part of the story, etc.
  IV.   What are the possibilities for further symbolism? Contemporary Roman writers begin to use storms as allegory for emotional or psychological turmoil.

5. Some *Odyssey 5* and *Aeneid 1* parallels:

Odyssey (5.282-464)	*Aeneid*
Poseidon creates storm to delay Odysseus	Juno has Aeolus create storm
Odysseus fears to die at sea	Aeneas does same
A goddess saves Odysseus	A god saves Aeneas
Odysseus lands on shore from which he will sail to his homeland	Aeneas lands on shore from which he will sail to new home
Nausicaa attracted to Odysseus	Dido attracted to Aeneas
Odysseus recounts all his travels	Aeneas recounts Troy and travels

Differences:

Odyssey	*Aeneid*
Poseidon knows about prophecy of Odysseus getting safely home	No prophecy mentioned at this point, just Juno's anger
Odysseus survives alone	Aeneas survives with most of men
Odysseus is safely conveyed home by the Phaeacians	Aeneas creates bitter enmity with Carthage