

The aeniad: aeneas and mezentius essay

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Book ten of The Aeneid incorporates varied similes on the heroic figures of Aeneas and Mezentius. These similes further illustrate to its audience the character and nature of Aeneas and Mezentius. Lines 778 to 783 offers an epic simile of Aeneas, “ Just as Aegaeon, who had a hundred arms and hands-they say-and fire burning from his fifty mouths and chests, when he clanged at Jove’s thunderbolts with his fifty shields, each one just like the other, and drew as many swords, so does Aeneas rage on, victorious, across the field...”[1] Aegaeon was one of the three “ hundred handed” monsters who were superior to the Titans, yet fought on their side against the Olympians in Greek mythology. Virgil likens Aeneas to one of these ferocious creatures when he is on the battlefield because his skill and swiftness with the sword makes him a vicious warrior. Also, in comparing him to a creature stronger than a titan who fought against Olympians reveals on the relationship between Aeneas and the gods.

Aeneas is fighting now so that he may found Rome as the gods and Fate have destined him to, however he did not embark upon founding Rome when the gods wanted him to. In the act of delaying he exerted the power of his free will and in sense fought against the gods and fate. Mezentius is compared to a rock in line 947, “ Just like a rock that juts into a waste of waters, bare to maddened winds and naked to the breakers, taking the force and menace both of heaven and of the seas, while it persists, unmoved; such is Mezentius. ”[2] Mezentius unlike the swift, many handed Aeneas, is a sturdy unbreakable power. He cannot be moved no matter what assails him, he stronger than all he confronts. This same idea of Mezentius’ incredible inner strength manifested as a warrior is shown in the epic simile in line 970,

“ Just as a boar that for long years, found shelter within Mount Vesulus’ pine forests or among the marshlands of Laurentum, where he pastured on rich reeds, when driven down from his high hills by gnashing dogs and caught by rings of netting, halts and fiercely roars and bristles up his shoulders; not one hunter has heart enough to show his anger or move in against him, but far off and safe they hound and harry him with shafts and shouts; then even so, no one, however just his indignation, dares to meet Mezentius with drawn sword, they provoke him from a distance with missiles and loud shouts.

He hesitates from side to side, but unafraid, gnashing his teeth, he shakes their lances from his shield. ” [3] Mezentius’ incredible ferocity makes him a warrior few have the courage to reckon with, except the hero who equals him, Aeneas, who ends life of this fearsome warrior. The comparisons Virgil delineates in his similes best capture the qualities he wants to display in his characters. The exceptional warriors Aeneas and Mezentius are revealed to the audience by the illumination of the epic similes in book ten of The Aeneid.