

The aenid

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

How does Aeneas's piety and sense of duty change as the poem unfolds? To what extent is the Aeneid a political poem? Is it propaganda? Discuss with reasons and examples. After reading the Aeneid, it becomes easy for the reader to develop a rapport for its lead character Aeneas, a man who, despite unimaginable obstacles, always stays true to his goals and convictions. While travelling from a war ravaged Troy, Aeneas and his fellow Trojans are put through test after test of their strength and character as Juno (queen of the gods) does her best to keep Aeneas and his men from achieving their goal.

Juno, who holds a grudge with the Trojans, summons the help of Aeolus (god of the winds) to keep Aeneas & his men from reaching Italy. Aeneas and (8 of his 20 ships) survive the ravaging winds and land in Carthage where they are welcomed by Dido (the queen of Carthage). This affords Aeneas and his men the opportunity to rest & refresh before continuing on to Italy. Throughout their journey Aeneas selflessly works as a leader and motivator for his men despite his own fears and concerns.

Aeneas's piety and sense of duty clearly drive everything he does throughout the poem. He believes that his destiny to settle in Italy will come to pass as long as he stays true to his beliefs and listens to the will of Jupiter (king of the gods). When faced with the ultimate distraction, the offer of the love of Dido and the opportunity to settle down and have a home in this prosperous city without any further hardship, Aeneas quickly puts his own wishes aside to continue on his journey at the urging of Jupiter.

Despite this temptation (and a brief respite from his duties as a leader) it is obvious to the reader that Aeneas's piety and sense of duty are unwavering. As for the political nature of the poem, it could be said that the story does have a political undertone. While Aeneas is the leader of the post-war Trojans, he shows all of the classic signs of a great politician. He always projects strength, courage, and a sense of calm control despite the adversities he and his men constantly face.

Aeneas never shows any weakness in front of men he leads, and always puts duty before his own personal wishes. Although Aeneas was briefly distracted by Dido's romantic interest, upon being reminded by Jupiter of his obligation he immediately returned to his role as a leader. By contrast, Dido, who is a political leader in her own right, shows a similar conviction for those she commands, until she develops a romantic interest in Aeneas, at which time she neglects her leadership duties as she indulges her personal interests.

The romantic interlude between these two characters shows the difference in their sense of duty toward those they command. What was just a brief distraction for Aeneas turned out to be the undoing of Dido, who ultimately left the people of Carthage without leadership. Dido was unable to focus on the politics of Carthage after her affair with Aeneas, and her obsession with that affair drove her to end her own life.

It seems as though Virgil (author of the Aeneid) is trying to create a political "moral" to the story with the contrast between Aeneas and Dido. While Aeneas's conviction for his job as a leader paints him as a hero and an inspiration to all, Dido's selfishness towards her people tells a cautionary tale

of what could have happened to the Trojans had Aeneas been a man of lesser character. The poem shows how the personal whims of a political leader (or lack thereof) can dramatically change the fates of those that he or she commands.

Virgil writes the poem in a style that makes his intentions seem innocent enough, as though he were just sharing a factual account with the reader rather than trying to sway his or her beliefs with propaganda, yet it becomes obvious to the reader that there is an underlying glorification of Aeneas, his mission, and the entire founding of the Roman empire. In Book VI, Aeneas is in the underworld and meets the future heroes of Rome and learns of an amazing, perhaps even idyllic future that awaits his descendants. While perhaps not clear propaganda, the author clearly holds Aeneas, his mission, and the Roman people in high regard.