

The ideal roman ruler essay sample



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The Aeneid was written during a time of great political change in Rome. Civil conflict had brought about the fall of the republic and its replacement with a strong executive that was given the title of emperor. In 31 B. C. E., the emperor Augustus, who controlled the western half of the Roman empire, would win a decisive victory over Mark Antony, the ruler of the eastern half of the empire, and unite Rome under one authority and bring about a long period of peace. However, these changes caused many of the people to lose their faith in the greatness of Rome. Virgil wrote The Aeneid in an attempt to bring back traditional Roman values and to legitimize the rule of Augustus Caesar by connecting him to the origin story of Rome through the descendants of Aeneas. Virgil's The Aeneid, shows that Aeneas is the ideal Roman ruler because he follows the Roman virtues of moderation, planning ahead, and toughness. Aeneas displays moderation when he leaves Dido, he shows his forward planning by putting all other interests in his life behind the task of establishing the city of Rome, and he shows his toughness in his journey to the underworld.

Aeneas is a prototype for the ideal Roman ruler because he follows the virtue of temperantia, or moderation. He shows this moderation in his leaving Dido to go establish the great city of Rome. Aeneas does not want to leave Carthage or his love, Dido, but it is his task "to found the Roman people" and he is "devoted to his mission" (Virgil 797, 796). Aeneas displays moderation because he controls his desire "to calm and comfort [Dido] in all her pain", but he "took the course heaven gave him" (Virgil 815).

Furthermore, the queen was very rich and had given him gifts of "yellow jasper" and a cloak with "gold thread in the fabric" (Virgil 811). However, his

value of moderation drives him to put his own passions and wants in subjection to his duty. This is a decision that few people could make themselves and if they did they would feel a great sense of loss. Aeneas pushes his feelings aside and does what has to be done for the future of Rome.

The Aeneid shows that Aeneas is the model Roman ruler by his use of wisdom and planning ahead. His leaving Dido shows forward planning as well as moderation because Aeneas cuts all ties with her. Even though he was “shaken still with love for her”, he “went back to his fleet” (Virgil 815). If he had given her any sign that he still wanted to stay or if he had given in to her pleas to stay just a little longer it would have been harder for him to leave. He is looking to the future by leaving as quickly as he can before he gets too attached to her and can’t make himself leave. Also, he shows his wisdom through reason. Dido is the voice of raw emotion in this circumstance and Aeneas doesn’t allow her emotions or his emotions to take over. Aeneas’s wisdom is also shown in the underworld because he allows himself to show emotion at the sight of Dido. He is able to tell her how he really felt without sacrificing his duty because there is no way for her to be with him anymore. Aeneas is giving in to his emotions at the one time that it is safe for him to do so.

Aeneas is the paramount Roman ruler because he portrays the traditional Roman virtue of toughness. Aeneas had to be tough to travel to the underworld; a place few ever return from. Virgil describes the underworld as a place where “grief and avenging cares have made their beds” and a home to “diseases and sad age” (Virgil 825). It would take strength to knowingly

travel into a place that was so dark and miserable. The underworld is also the home to many monsters, such as “ Centaurs”, “ hundred armed Briareus”, and “ Chimaera breathing dangerous flames” (Virgil 825). Aeneas is “ swept by sudden fear” and draws his sword, but he does not allow his fear to keep him from going on to see his father (Virgil 825). Aeneas also shows his toughness after his father has shown him what Rome will become by continuing to work towards making Rome a great empire. Aeneas knows that he will never see Rome come to its full glory, but that doesn't cause him to forget his own destiny. He returns from the underworld and still settles Italy. It must have been hard to have sacrificed so much for Rome and continue to sacrifice for Rome and knowing he would never see its greatness.

Aeneas is the ideal Roman ruler because he follows the traditional Roman virtues of moderation, wisdom, and toughness. His strict determination to follow these morals is what makes him an epic hero. He shows his moderation and wisdom by leaving Dido the way that he did and he shows his toughness in his journey to the underworld and his willingness to work for the future of Rome even though he will never see its glory. Aeneas's strength in the subordination of personal desires to duty is what makes him so iconic and the ideal Roman ruler.

Works Cited

Simon, Peter, and Conor Sullivan, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Shorter Second Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009. Print.