

Fate and destruction:
the power of fate in
aeneas' journey
essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout Virgil's Aeneid fate directs the protagonist and hero, Aeneas, via the gods and goddesses. Aeneas makes certain decisions himself, but every aspect of his life and journey are influenced by Fate, prophecy and predictions. Repeatedly the gods, through dreams or visions, appear to him, direct his path and solidify his destiny to found the great city of Rome. Turnus and Dido, both prominent figures in the epic poem who die at the hands of Aeneas, are affected by the Fate of the gods either directly or through Aeneas.

The divine sway of the gods and Fate infringes on Aeneas' free will to control his life and remain a reluctant warrior until the power of raw emotion pushes him to kill Turnus. Aeneas is destined to found Rome, but first he must complete a series of obstacles created by the gods, which control his every move. The first sentence of the poem reads, " Wars and a man I sing-an exile driven on by Fate" (Virgil 47). The Fates and the gods have a plan for Aeneas and the time has come to fulfill their arrangements. Being the son of a mortal and goddess (Anchises and Venus) leaves Aeneas as the perfect vehicle for founding Rome, and implies sanctified protection by the gods. Aeneas acknowledges his destiny, and despite his unhappiness, continues on his pre-set path because his piety remains strong.

Even Juno, the goddess set against Aeneas and the Trojans, cannot prevent him from Fate. Each Divine intervention pushes Aeneas in a different direction; either setting obstacles, putting him back on his path, or getting him out of a situation that could get him killed. For instance, when the Trojans and Latins are preparing to fight, Venus becomes concerned and intercedes: " now I do come, kneeling before the godhead I adore, begging

<https://assignbuster.com/fate-and-destruction-the-power-of-fate-in-aeneas-journey-essay/>

weapons for my Aeneas, a mother for her son! " (254). Venus uses her powers to aid Aeneas and his men because otherwise they would be killed. With weapons built by Vulcan they have a high advantage over the Latins.

Vulcan forges a shield for Aeneas along with swords and armor for his men, but the shield holds the most significance. It tells the story of the Roman glory awaiting Italy. Therefore, not only is the shield an intervention from the gods, but a symbol aiming to spark Aeneas' excitement about his destiny because he is a reluctant warrior: " The captain Aeneas...

extended the olive branch of peace: ' We're Trojans born. The weapons you see are honed for our foes, the Latins. They drive us here-as exiles-with all the arrogance of war" (245). He views war as arrogant, a very bold statement for a supposed head of a fleet.

Without intrusion, Aeneas would follow his own path and emotions, but the gods cannot have that, as seen with the passionate, erotic, love affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage. Aeneas turns from a handsome, valiant warrior, to a man depicted as cold and heartless, who only has eyes for the gods, which occurs partially at the hands of the gods, but also from Aeneas' own self-interest. Venus, once again, fears for Aeneas' life when entering Carthage because she is concerned about the city waging war on the Trojans. She inspires another intervention by causing Dido to fall in love with Aeneas. She sends Cupid down and says, " poison the queen and she will never know" (70). On Venus' command Cupid heads to the Queen disguised as Ascanius, Aeneas' son, and inflames her with passion and love.

Juno views this as a wonderful opportunity to halt the Trojans from founding Rome and arranges a sort of marriage, which in reality is passionate sex in a cave, to make their bond stronger. This moment begins conflict with Dido and Aeneas because they both have different understandings of what happened in the cave; Dido viewed it as marriage and Aeneas as sex. A misunderstanding this large is bound for disaster. They become enthralled with one another and this worries the gods that he will never leave Carthage so he is reminded of his path through a vision sent down by Jupiter.

Aeneas drops his love affair for piety resulting in Dido's rage. Despite Venus' mediation with Dido, Aeneas should have shown greater self-restraint because he knew his fate; therefore he knew the affair would not continue. Nevertheless he became erotically involved with Dido only to blame his eventual sudden departure on the gods and initially try to keep it secret: " I never dreamed I'd keep my flight a secret...

If the Fates had left me free to live my life, to arrange my own affairs of my own free will, Troy is the city, first of all, that I'd safeguard" (139). He implies he wishes he never got involved with Dido and the gods are the cause of her suffering. It seems that Aeneas has some remorse during his pauses within the speech, showing a loss of words. This can also be interpreted as Aeneas simply speaking indirectly and nervously because he knows Dido's powerful rage. More likely is that he feels pain and guilt for his actions. He spent a good portion of his journey with Dido building her city, and if he had not loved her or cared deeply for her, he could have chosen to leave.

Only when the gods intervened did he choose to flee Carthage. In that sense, it was the gods who forced him to leave, but if he was honest in his speech to Dido when saying he would have safeguarded Troy over Carthage, he should have left a long time ago. Even still Virgil describes him as “ driven by duty” but “ long[ing] to ease and allay her sorrow, speak to her, turn away her anguish... ” (141).

His heart is shattered but piety to the gods is more important, which shows when he sleeps peacefully while Dido is engulfed with outrage and pain for losing her lover. Her final curse on Aeneas before she commits suicide shows her degree of rage: “ war between all our peoples, all their children, endless war! ” (149). She is cursing a warrior sick of war, with endless, eternal, war. The curse follows Aeneas on his journey when he encounters the Latins and most notably, Turnus. The death of Turnus benefits Aeneas more than it hurts him because it shows that the will of the gods cannot be halted and that he has privileged over Turnus. Turnus does not have the same protection that Aeneas has, and Aeneas uses that to his advantage and destines Turnus' fate by killing him.

His death solidifies the importance of fate and the force of the gods, especially when the gods are vengeful. Even with Juno on Turnus' side he never has the protection Aeneas has. Latinus, King of the Latins, exemplifies Turnus' disadvantage and says, “ You Turnus, the guilt is yours, and a dreadful end awaits you-you will implore the gods with prayers that come too late! ” (232). Aeneas is not present to hear Latinus' words, but he knows that he has the King's support, therefore, Turnus' death boosts Aeneas' notion of

his sanctification. The war with the Latins reveals the warrior side of Aeneas he tried to suppress.

He becomes a killing machine, not caring who he kills because his mind is in war mode. During war Aeneas flourishes into the epic war hero character the reader expects from a Trojan leader. Although the war was not necessarily part of his Fate, he needed to marry Lavinia, and war was the only means of doing so. Turnus' death was another excluded part of his fate that reveals Aeneas' true human quality that he seemed to lack throughout the novel acting like a puppet to the gods. As Turnus and Aeneas go head to head in battle, Aeneas beats him down and has the power to kill him, decides to spare his life. Previously Turnus made a scene about his honor meaning more than his life.

His statement belies his actions with Aeneas because he ignores the fact that he lost the head on battle fairly and he deserved death. The belt on Turnus' shoulder, belonging to Pallas, a young warrior who was the son of Evander, altered his decisions and without regret, Aeneas kills him (386). His choice is entirely conscious and shows no sympathy when Turnus pleads for his life. Aeneas' journey resulted in the loss of countless lives, but more importantly Aeneas' mercy was lost. Aeneas was portrayed through most of the poem as a somewhat just and moral person, merely abiding the gods and their commands.

In the final moments of the epic tale, Aeneas becomes a grand warrior, slaying a man pleading at his feet. The poem ends with a dismal account of Turnus' death: " Turnus' limbs went limp in the chill of death. His life breath

fled with a groan of outrage down to the shades below" (386). No clear resolution concludes the poem. The reader is left to assume that Aeneas founded Rome and married Lavinia, leading one to conclude that Aeneas was not the main focus of the tale; the founding of the Roman Empire was.

Virgil wanted the Romans to read the poem and feel that they ended the poem gloriously. This further exemplifies Aeneas' role as a vehicle for the fate of Rome that the gods exploited. He was the perfect candidate for the job: strong, half mortal half god, abiding, and experienced. The divine influence scattered throughout the poem proved effective in completing their goal of founding Rome, but the intervention also caused Aeneas to live a life not his own. His fate was predetermined and he was aware of his duties, but he greatly impacted others along the way. Dido and Aeneas' passionate affair began at the hands of Venus and ended at the hands of Jupiter, showing that Aeneas was living pleasantly and happily with her and was forced to leave, but asks the question of what Aeneas would have done without the god's involvement.

He may have passed through Carthage with no problem, or Dido may have declared war on the Trojans, which he would have been saved from.

Nonetheless, he blamed their relationship on the gods because he did not want to hurt Dido and to alleviate personal responsibility. It is hard to blame Aeneas because the Fates and the gods did have him under their control. His knowledge of their power left him fearless against the battle and Turnus.

Although godly influence was not in favor of Turnus, he fought Aeneas for Lavinia's hand in marriage. Turnus is fervent about his love for Lavinia,

while Aeneas desires her marriage because his destiny calls for it. Turnus knows he is fated to lose, which displays his courage and dedication to Lavinia, but Aeneas' fate leaves him victorious and changes him as a person. Through Aeneas' character shift, Vergil is stressing the importance of following one's personal will rather than the will of others because one becomes a person he or she refrained from becoming.

If Aeneas had followed his free will he would probably be in Troy with his fleet and thousands of lives would be saved. The selfishness of the gods pushed him forth and turned him into a medium by which to fulfill their wishes.