

What literature shows regarding the role of women as a powerful figure essay



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It is generally known that women are perceived as weak, dependent, and helpless. This probably results from the fact that women, even in the early records of History, are deemed as the inferior sex compared to men.

However, modern times have changed this unfair and prejudiced perception, resulting in overwhelming opportunities for the “weaker sex.” Both Literature and History have given evidences that women are the inferior sex—archetypes of the woman as being weak seem to pervade the pages of those two branches of knowledge.

Usually, women are depicted as incapable of great feats and leading wonderful expeditions and adventures. Women are always the wife, the daughter, the grandmother, the damsel-in-distress; there are only few accounts in both history and literature depicting women who are powerful or capable of heroic feats (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman and Willingham, 187-188). This paper will delve deeply into the portrayal of the women present in Virgil’s *The Aeneid* and their acts of “rebellion and courage” that have proven many readers that there is strong and wrong notion that women are plain weaklings. The Queen Dido in the Position of Power A queen by the name of Dido rules as the sole leader in the island of Carthage where Aeneas finds himself stranded after a storm. In the Roman and Greek Mythologies, a woman ruling a whole nation is unheard of and it is in a greater extent that a woman would be the sole ruler of that particular nation.

Thus, by putting Dido in a pedestal and position of power, Virgil attempted to break from the prejudice of the weak woman archetype. However, just the position itself is an act of power and not the person. As with many literary figures, there are instances wherein women have somehow shown downfall

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or a relapse in their strong demeanor and character whenever the subject of men and love comes in. For example, Juliet of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* even committed suicide because she cannot get what she wants in life—her Romeo.

The Queen Dido is the same to a great extent, as she is unable to stop the anguish that she feels when Aeneas leaves Carthage. She even offers her love, virginity, and position as long as Aeneas would stay, even blindly thinking and being disillusioned with the consummation that they do in the cave during the storm when they were out hunting. Queen Dido is therefore a powerful figure in terms of the power and position that she has, but she is not necessarily a fine figure of femme fatale when it comes to her actions and decisions.

The Goddesses of the Roman Mythology There are three significant goddesses in the epic of Virgil that have profound importance in the war and the adventures of the protagonist, Aeneas. It can be remembered that Minerva, Juno, and Venus (in Greek Mythology, they are called Pallas Athene or Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite, respectively) have a hand in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, most especially in the war that transpired between the Greeks and the Trojans. Thus, the mythologies have always proven that the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus are more often than not responsible for the fates of the Romans.

Such is the case with the tale of Aeneas. Due to the conflict between the three goddesses, the fate and destiny of Aeneas keeps changing and turning. In simple terms, it is the women in the epic who control the plot and life of the protagonist even if they are in the background and seem to have

no immediate effect on Aeneas. Again, as with the case of the Queen Dido, the women are merely powerful because of the position they are in.

However, the power of Juno over her husband Jupiter and the wiles that she uses to persuade him is a proof itself that in some form, she indeed has the power. The same applies with Aphrodite who persuades other gods (Neptune and Vulcan) to help the cause of Aeneas and to protect him. The goddesses then, through their own manners of persuasion, wit, and intelligence, have managed to persuade other powerful beings to champion their own agendas.

The Women Who Stepped Out of the Norm In the epic poem, there are two women who showed great power and stepped out of the norm in the case of womanhood: Queen Amata, the female ruler of Laurentum (alongside the King Latinus), and her daughter, Lavinia. Queen Amata, aside from her position being a Queen, is loyal to her people and tries to champion the cause of Turnus, her daughter's other suitor aside from Aeneas.

The most compelling fact about her demeanor is that she greatly advocates that her people (Italians) will be for the Italians. Lavinia, on the other hand, is in a position of power in a sense that she alone is a determiner of the fate of her people. As what is customary in the past, whoever marries the princess or heir of a kingdom is used to garner more power or unite kingdoms; such is the fate of Lavinia. Even if her marriage is used to determine who will rule Laurentum and what will be the destiny of her people—it alone is a proof that she, out all the women presented in the paper, holds the highest position of power. She dictates the future of the protagonist, Aeneas, and most of all, the hope of the fallen race of the Trojans.

Conclusion Even if women were

treated poorly in the past, there were instances when they showed power and defied the norm.

However, it cannot be denied that there are still judgments where women are considered as inferior; as what Estes, wrote in her book: “[the] generation grew up in a time when women were infantilized and treated as property. They were kept as fallow gardens” (3). Nevertheless, there are literary figures like the goddesses or even Queen Dido who shows otherwise.