

THE AENEID: ROMAN EPIC



The Aeneid

- ◉ Author: Virgil (Vergilivs Maro)
- ◉ Culture: Roman
- ◉ Time: 70-19 BC
- ◉ Genre: epic poetry
- ◉ Names to Know: Aeneas, Dido, Venus, Juno, Jupiter
- ◉ Themes: wandering hero, piety, devotion to duty, stoicism



Journal Write

- Compare the opening lines of the *Aeneid* to the opening lines of the *Iliad* and/or the *Odyssey*. Can you identify any similarities or differences?

I. Historical Background

- ◉ During Virgil's lifetime, Rome's system of Government was destroyed via a series of bloody civil wars.
- ◉ The last military leader left standing became the new emperor:
 - Augustus Caesar (Octavian), the adopted son of Julius Caesar.
 - (Cupid, son of goddess Venus and father Julius Ceasar)



- ⦿ Augustus reigned for over 40 yrs.
- ⦿ During that time, he promoted education and literature—and appointed several state poets:
 - The Augustine Poets: (The three most famous)
 - Virgil
 - Horace
 - Ovid (pronounced Ov-id)

Why write the *Aeneid*?

- Augustus appointed Virgil to give Rome one Great Epic piece of literature never to be matched.
- An epic that would portray Roman character/achievements to the rest of the world





- The emperor Augustus told Vergil to write a national epic as part of his propaganda program, to celebrate the new golden age of peace that Augustus' reign ushered in.
- Background: Rome's many civil wars and the death of the Republic.

- ◉ Virgil spent the last 10 years of his life working on this epic he called 'The Aeneid'
- ◉ He died before he had finished it—left orders to have it destroyed.
- ◉ Augustus found it and order it published.
- ◉ A perfectionist, Virgil worked at an agonizingly slow pace producing only 30-40 lines/day—then destroying all but 2-3 of the best of them every night.

What is the Aeneid about?

- The central character, Aeneas, a Trojan warrior from Greek and Roman myth whose mother was Venus, the goddess of love.
- Roman legend had Augustus coming from the goddess Venus, via Aeneas.
- So, Virgil connects Augustus and Aeneas.
- Thus, Augustus was the divinely sanctioned ruler of Rome.



II. The Mythological Background

- In connection to the Trojan War, Aeneas appears in the Iliad fighting against the Greeks.
- Troy is destroyed but Aeneas survives and escapes.
- Lands on Carthage (Rome did defeat Carthage)
- Aeneas tells the Queen of Carthage (Dido) of his troubles
- She falls in love with him...but he will leave her.

Two Mythic Traditions

2.19 Troy VI, stretch of eastern fortification wall from the south



- Roman: Romulus and Remus, suckled by the she-wolf, are the founders of Rome in 753 BCE.

- ◉ Greek: The Trojan War in 1250 BCE explains the founding of Rome.
- ◉ 40 years later a descendent of Aeneas gives birth to Romulus and Remus...



181. THE BRONZE SHE-WOLF OF THE ROMAN CAPITOL. Probably Etruscan, late sixth or early fifth century B.C. Rome, Museo dei Conservatori.

Narrative Structure

- Books 1-6: The Odyssean part
Aeneas as a wandering hero like Odysseus. His god-sent mission is to found a new city. Essentially, once the Greeks sack Troy, Aeneas and some Trojan ships escape to found a new Troy.
- Books 7-12: The Iliadic part
Aeneas and the Trojans at war with the Italians & their allies.

The Roman Hero

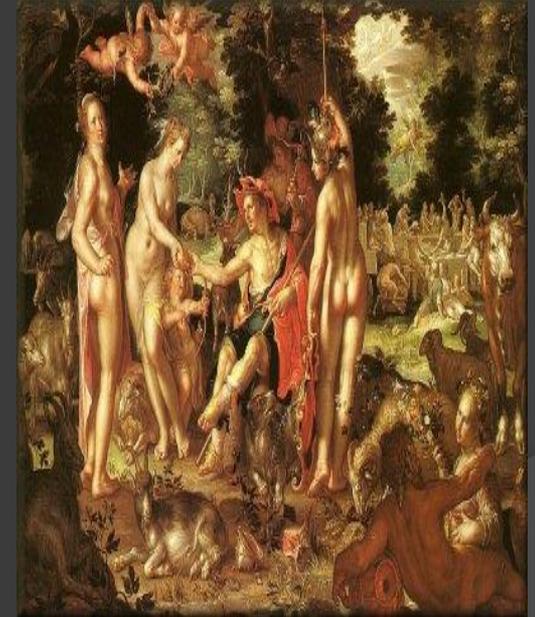


157. AENEAS SACRIFICING TO THE TROJAN GODS IN ITALY.
Roman relief, 13-9 B.C. from the Altar of Peace, Rome.

- Aeneas' epithet: pious
- Roman heroism: is on behalf of the community, not the individual. [self sacrifice]
- Stoicism: Aeneas subsumes his personal desires for the good of the community [unlike Greek heroes who are very individualistic].

Book 1: Aeneas in Carthage

- ◉ In lines 13-49, we learn why Aeneas suffers - the wrath of Juno.
- ◉ Two reasons:
 - Troy (Judgment of Paris, a past event: Paris didn't pick Juno/Hera as the loveliest goddess, he chose Venus)
 - Carthage (she knew Rome would conquer this, her favorite city, a future event)



The Wrath of Juno



- ◉ Angry, Juno asks Aeolus [master of wind] to drive the Trojan ships off course, shipwreck them if possible.
- ◉ The bribe: she offers Aeolus the lovely nymph Deiopeia
- ◉ Result: one shipwreck before Neptune calms the sea.

Arrival in Libya



158. THE SHIPS OF AENEAS TOSSED BY STORM.
From a manuscript of the *Aeneid*, fifth century A.D.
Rome, Vatican Library, cod.lat.vat.3867, fol.77. The Codex Romanus.

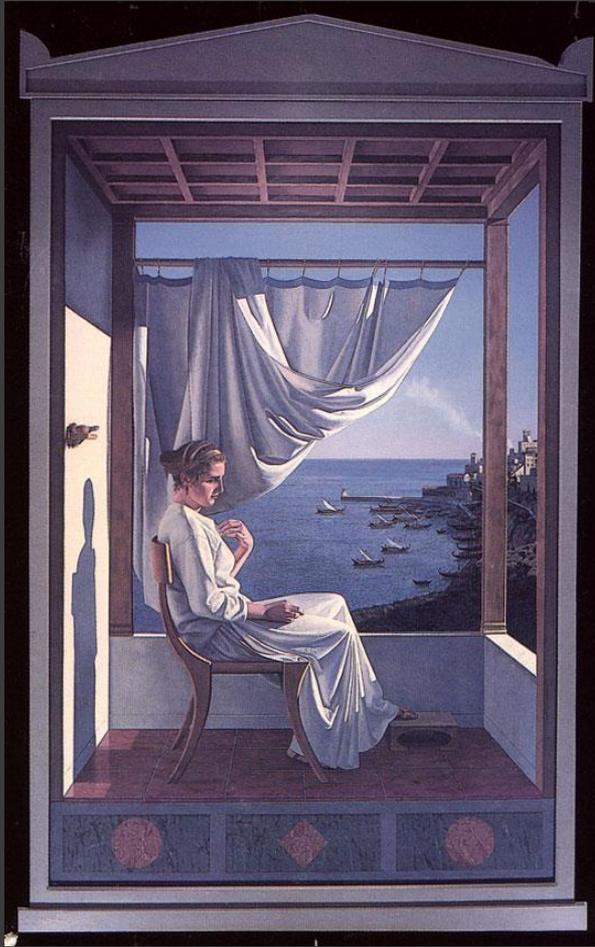
- Aeneas puts into shore with only 7 ships from his fleet.
- He gives a pep talk to his men, recalling the horrors they have already survived (Scylla, land of the Cyclopes, etc.)

Venus' Appeal & Jupiter's Prophecy



- ◉ While the Trojans recover onshore, Aeneas' mother Venus approaches her father Jupiter on behalf of her son
 - Jupiter had promised that Aeneas would successfully found a new city [Rome].
- ◉ Jupiter's promise: "For these I set no limits, world or time, but make the gift of empire without end . . . Lords of the world, the toga-wearing Romans"

Dido and the Carthaginians



- ◉ Jupiter sends Mercury down to make Dido and her people receptive to the Trojans.
- ◉ Meanwhile, Aeneas encounters his disguised mother, who tells him Dido's history [Dido has sworn never to love or marry since the death of her husband].
- ◉ Venus also makes Aeneas very attractive to Dido.

Aeneas comments on himself

- Book 1.500-505

“I am Aeneas, duty-bound (translation of the Latin ‘pius’), and known above high air of heaven by my fame, carrying with me in my ships our gods of hearth and home, saved from the enemy. I look for Italy to be my fatherland, and my descent is from all-highest Jove. . . . I followed the given fates.”

The Temple of Juno

- Hidden in a cloud, Aeneas goes into Carthage. He sees the temple of Juno, its walls painted with scenes from the Trojan War.
- We know from this that the Carthaginians are civilized; the Carthaginians are very sympathetic to the events his city Troy suffered.

Dido Assaulted by Eros

- ◉ While Venus & Cupid infect Dido with eros for Aeneas, Aeneas tells the Carthaginians about the Fall of Troy and his wanderings.
- ◉ Book 2: The Fall of Troy from the Trojan Point of view.
- ◉ Book 3: Aeneas' wanderings, from Thrace, Crete, Sicily, to Carthage.



III. Literary Background