

## **Aeneas: a hero, a puppet of the Gods or just a man with a mission? Discuss with reference to Aeneid 1 and 2: -Bola Taiwo**

Virgil portrays Aeneas in many ways. One of the ways he portrays him is as a hero. In the opening scene Aeolus at Junos command has caught Aeneas up in a storm. So immediately we get the picture of the hero at sea, buffeted by weather and impeded by unexpected encounters, this image is a frequent motif in epic poetry. The idea of Aeneas being a hero is further emphasised to me because this scene is reminiscent of "The Odyssey" and Ulysses. Many times Homer depicted him to be in stormy weather, and just like all heroes always survives.

As Trojan leader, Aeneas respects prophecy. This would be very important to the audience because all good heroes were very pious men, and Aeneas shows us he is a god-fearing hero, and therefore a good hero. His ability to accept his destined path despite his unhappiness in doing so makes him a graceful hero, worthy of all honour and favour the God's bestow upon him. This characteristic would evoke admiration in the audience and was purposely done so by Virgil because an underlying theme is the inevitability of Aeneas' future.

Aeneas is a warrior but also very compassionate. His sympathy for the sufferings of others, whilst being single minded devoted to his duty is another aspect to his heroism. Virgil makes Aeneas first speech of the story very heroic to emphasise this fact. The speech was delivered to his crew upon their landing in Libya, his ability to suppress his own emotions and will in pursuit of his fated duty. Virgil tells us that Aeneas has "contained his anguish" and "feigned hope" in order to rally the morale of his crew by reminding them of past hardships and future glory.

"So summon up your courage once again. This is no time for gloom and fear. The day will come perhaps, when it will give you pleasure to remember even this" Book 1 (L203-207)

He has been depicted so far as a hero not because of bravado but rather because of his warm character. However in Book 2 Virgil makes out to be a more typical hero, brave and up for a fight. When he hears Troy is being overthrown he gets his armour and goes out to slay people like a good hero should, showing bravery because he knows he is outnumbered.

"My spirit was renewed and I rushed to bring relief to the palace of my king, to help its defenders, to put in those who were defeated" (L451-453) Book 2.

Despite Virgil's depiction of Aeneas as a hero he also makes him out to be the puppet of the god and heavily controlled by their every whim and desire. Juno who has her personal discrepancies with the way things will turn out interferes with Aeneas every step of the way. The opening storm in book 1 is a good example. The ship was tossed around, many were killed. Aeneas was helpless in this situation and was being controlled like a puppet.

After the storm his mother Venus begs Jupiter to end his sufferings. The suffering ends momentarily. Whilst in the woods Venus appears to her son and advises him to go and see Dido, he obeys these orders without question further giving the impression of him being bossed around. Venus was worried that the Phoenicians would be bad to her son so sent cupid to inflame Dido's heart for Aeneas. Again Aeneas has no control over this situation, which is surprising because a man should have control over a thing like love rather than it being imposed on him and seemingly forced to love someone. After observing all these divine interventions it seems that the whole happenings are out of his control and so give the illusion of him being a puppet.

Some people argue the biggest example of his domination by the Gods was in book two where he was ordered to leave Troy against his own will. His mother tells him "You are my mortal son, and do not be afraid to do what I command you, and do not disobey me" (L604-607) Book 2. This is because Troy was destined to be destroyed, and so bravery from Aeneas would be inappropriate and vain. In addition Virgil has big plans for Aeneas, and it has Jupiter's backing. Aeneas is to reach Italy and become the father of the people of Rome. This is the fate, which runs throughout the book. If the reader bears this in mind we realise Aeneas no matter how battered and

bossed around by the other Gods he is. He is still a man on a mission and he uses his respect of the Gods (obeying orders) and heroic nature to carry out his tasks.

I think that Aeneas is a man on a mission more than anything else because, the direction and destination of Aeneas' course was preordained, and his various sufferings and glories in the battle and at sea over the course of the epic merely postpone his unchangeable mission. The power fate and sense of duty stands over Aeneas. Aeneas's mission was the will of Jupiter and so this will triumph over the wills of the other Gods. Aeneas' most important task therefore on his mission was to preserve his sanity and his life by subordinating his own desires to the demands of fate and the rules of piety. When we look at this at a first glance we might conclude he is a puppet on a string but I conclude he is a true hero playing his way through life in order to achieve his ultimate goal. Virgil's audience would definitely view him as a hero as they know his fate and they are meant to be a direct testament of his survival.

Virgil wrote the Aeneid during the golden age of the Roman empire, he purposed was to write a myth of Rome's origins that would emphasize the grandeur and legitimise the success of the empire. Therefore it makes more sense for Aeneas, person who brought all this about to be a hero on a mission rather than an Olympian Mannequin, this is what I feel Virgil intended.