

Aeneas and Dido in the First Book of The Aeneid

In this essay I will be examining the characteristics of the characters Aeneas and Dido as they appear in the first book of the Aeneid.

In the first book of the Aeneid, Virgil introduces Aeneas. Aeneas is shown to be a Trojan hero and prince who survived the siege and sacking of Troy and managed to lead a band of survivors to safety.

Aeneas is the son of Anchises and the goddess of love, Venus. After fighting in the Trojan War, Aeneas escaped after the Greeks sacked the city, leading a small band of survivors on a quest to find Latium, where, it had been revealed, the descendants of Aeneas would found the beginnings of the Roman Empire. After leaving Sicily, on what the Trojans believe to be the final stage of their journey, Juno sends a storm, which wrecks some of the ships and scatters the rest. She does this because she believes a race descended from the Trojans will destroy her beloved city of Carthage.

After the storm, Aeneas makes his way to the shores of Libya, where he is met by his mother, Venus, disguised as a huntress. She tells him to make for the city of Carthage. There he is welcomed by Queen Dido, and reunited with the rest of his followers who have survived the storm. Dido invites the Trojans to a great banquet where Venus arranges that Dido will fall in love with Aeneas.

Aeneas displays many qualities that make him stand out. These include qualities associated with leadership and also others. These qualities are:

- Responsible Leader – Aeneas is the leader of the group of survivors and he takes on those responsibilities. For example, upon landing on the shores of Libya, it is Aeneas who climbs to a vantage point to try and learn of the location of the rest of the fleet, “Aeneas climbed up a rock, looking for a good view out over the sea, in hope of seeing Trojan ships.” He is also the one who goes out to explore the surrounding land, “As soon as the kind light of day allowed, he determined to set out and explore this strange country, to find out where the wind had brought them.”
- Provision for his men – Tying in with the responsible leader point, Aeneas is always the one to provide for his men. One of the first things he does after setting up camp on the shores of Libya is to find food for his men, “He kept on shooting until he’d triumphantly stretched on the ground seven great (deer) carcasses – one for each of the ships”

- Encouraging – Aeneas gives speeches to inspire and encourage his men. One of the first examples of this is when Aeneas gives a speech to encourage and cheer up his men after they have been ravaged in a storm and cast upon an unknown shore. “My friends, we’ve known troubles enough in the past, and we’ve suffered still worse: god *will* bring an end to these too. You sailed right past that mad Scylla and her deeply resounding cavern: you survived the Cyclops’ rocks. Cheer up! Enough of sorrow and fear! One day, perhaps, even this will be something good to remember. Whatever the disasters we meet, whatever the crises we go through, our goal is Latium! The Fates point to a home for us there, and peace. There a kingdom of Troy can rise once again. Don’t give up now! Save yourselves for the good things to come!” Aeneas uses trying events that the survivors have already experienced to encourage them to go on.
- Emotional – Aeneas is emotional but he tries to hide his feelings if they would damage the morale of his group. For example Aeneas is grieving over the loss of his friends and followers in the storm sent by Juno, but he “buried the grief deep in his heart” and gave a speech to inspire and encourage his men.
- Commands respect – King Aeneas is respected by his followers. Ilioneus praises him to Queen Dido “No man has been more just or dutiful, no one greater in war and fighting.”
- Self-Pitying – This ties in directly with the emotional point. Aeneas, despite being a courageous and good leader, occasionally enters into bouts of self-pity. One of these is when he is caught in the storm sent by Juno. He cries out, wishing that he had died a “hero’s death” on the fields of battle at Troy, rather than suffer in the storm. “You were the lucky ones,” he cries, “three times lucky and more, who had the good fortune to die under the walls of Troy, before the eyes of your fathers! Why couldn’t I have died and yielded my soul to Diomedes, bravest of the Greeks, on the Trojan Plains?”
- Warmth – When Aeneas meets Dido he shows warmth towards her. He compliments her and thanks her for her offer to allow the Trojans to live in Carthage. “What golden age were you born in? What great parents produced such a daughter? As long as rivers flow down to the seas, as long as the shadows sweep over the mountains, and the sky keeps the stars alight, your name shall live for ever in honour and praise”.

- Flattering – Aeneas is charming. Aeneas, unlike Odysseus of Homer's Odyssey, does not use flattery to achieve gains, but merely to charm the person he is talking to. When he meets his mother, Venus, disguised as a huntress he compliments and flatters her, "Your face is no mortals, no more your voice; you must be a goddess – Apollo's sister, or one of the nymphs?"
- Capable of admiration – Aeneas recognises the good things about the city of Carthage and he admires the way the city is built. "Aeneas was standing in awe, gazing spellbound and lost in these marvellous pictures". This shows us that Aeneas is not arrogant and is capable of recognising beauty and greatness.

In the first book, Virgil also introduces Dido. Dido is the Queen and founder of Carthage, the city where Aeneas finds himself after the storm. Dido originates from Tyre, where she was married to the richest of all men in the land, Sychaeus. Dido loved Sychaeus and was devoted to him. Dido's brother was the King of Tyre and he was a man of unparalleled evil. His name was Pygmalion. One day, blinded by greed, Pygmalion cut down Sychaeus while he was off guard, praying at the altar. Pygmalion then tried to hide his crime, fobbing Dido off with lie after lie. However, the ghost of the dead man appeared to Dido in a dream, he told her of all that happened, showing the sword wound in his chest. The ghost urged Dido to escape the country in haste, revealing to her the location of an unknown hoard of buried treasure. Dido gathered her friends and haters of the king and stole a fleet of ships, sailing overseas with Pygmalion's treasure safely stored on board. They came to a place in the north of Africa where they bought land "as much as a bull's hide would surround" and there they founded a city, the city of Carthage.

Dido also displays many favourable qualities. Some of these are:

- Beauty – Queen Dido is beautiful. She is compared to the goddess Diana, "Just like (Diana), Queen Dido was happily moving through her courtiers to urge on the work, to hasten her future realm."
- Concerned for the defence of her city – Queen Dido places guards around her city to protect it. She explains why to Ilioneus, "My city is young: that's why I have to do such things, and guard every inch of my frontiers".
- Knowledgeable – Queen Dido has knowledge of affairs outside her kingdom, even as far away as Troy. She knows of the Trojan War and of Aeneas, "who has not heard of Aeneas' men, of the city of

Troy, the courage of its heroes, and the fires of its awful wars? Our Carthaginian wits are not as dull as that, nor is our city so cut off from the rest of the world!”

- Hospitable – When the Trojan survivors arrive, Queen Dido offers them food and wine. The Queen also sends food down to the survivors camped on the shore, “She sent twenty bulls to his companions down on the shore, a hundred huge, bristly-backed swine, the same number of ewes and fat lambs, and gifts of wine to delight them.” Queen Dido even offers the Trojans a permanent home in Carthage, where they are to be treated as equals, “This city I’m building, it’s yours. Haul up your ships. Trojan or Tyrian I’ll treat you the same.”
- Warmth – Queen Dido shows warmth and affection to Aeneas and his son. She hugs them and is touched by their gifts to her. “Fondly she hugs him (Aeneas’ son), again and again to her breast”.
- Fair and Just – Queen Dido is fair to all her subjects. She allocates responsibility and labour equally and she makes fair and just laws.

The way Virgil introduces Aeneas and Dido in the first book of the Aeneid makes the similarities between them easy to identify: They have both suffered hardships and have subsequently been forced to leave their native lands; they both are on quests to found new cities for their people; they both display distinctive leadership qualities; they are both capable of affection and warmth. It is these similarities between the two that makes it easier to identify them as both being the heroes in the book.