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Is it appropriate to describe Virgil Aeneid book four as a tragedy?

The Aeneid as written by Virgil is the great epic of one man who followed his destiny. He was both aided and hindered in his travels by the gods who watched his movements with great interest. But Aeneas was a hero, he understood what he was fated to do, what destiny needed fulfilling and despite great setbacks, of war and loss, Aeneas forges on to complete his task of founding Rome. The Aeneid is in certain respects a poem of tragedy, of what must be lost to regain anything more and in the first books of the poem this loss is focused on. The destruction of Troy, the ruin of a city and of the honorable men within, a city that held against the sons of Atreus for ten years but finally was brought down. Aeneas' personal losses in his wife and father, necessary though the former may have been, to allow Aeneas to begin a new family line, it was a painful loss. The death of a parent is not to be taken lightly and Aeneas is distraught over his father's passing, but regardless of this all he pushes onwards, showing a sense of duty, reaching forever outwards to the goal of Rome, nudged on by the gods who champion him. His piety is unquestionable and proven again and again, this obligation to the gods, his family, and his city.

Book four is the episode that encounters Dido, Queen of Carthage, who has suffered tragedy in her own forms, 'my husband was murdered and our home broken up by my brother's murderous act.' Dido whose city and person offer Aeneas what he so longs for. He has craved settlement, to be still in a city he can make his own, to find peace. There seems little other reason for Aeneas to linger in Carthage save that therein he finds a much-needed calm to prepare himself. An audience waits also for Aeneas to gather himself together and set sail, as the gods do, but there is a steady calm in the everyday life of Carthage that is as lethargic and enjoyable to an audience as to Aeneas. The introduction of a romance is a way for Virgil to return Aeneas to the reality of a man and not yet a great hero who is still swayed by temptation. This episode in Carthage exposes a greater view of Aeneas, he is shown as a man but also his understanding of his mission has become obvious and his devotion to his destiny overrides his demands as a man and he is able to remove himself from the comfortable life in Carthage, true commitment to the task set out before him.

Book four follows Dido and Aeneas as they experience this relationship and the hiatus in Aeneas' plans. They are encouraged from many sides, Dido's sister suggests, 'With the Trojans as our comrades in arms, what heights of glory will not we Carthaginians soar to!', and Juno, growing aware of the love Dido harbors for Aeneas goes to Venus and together they too conspire to bring the two together. How Dido and Aeneas later perceive their connection comes into question as to whether Aeneas was justified in his leaving but also in the tragedy of the story. They were brought together in a cave and Dido began to see her relations with Aeneas as a marriage, though he was not of the same mind. He seems to feel little by the way of obligation towards her, theirs was

a political connection, one that allows him power over Carthage and fame throughout Africa. She perceives their bond as a permanent one, 'the beautiful Dido deigns to have her name linked with his.' Perhaps it is in this self-deception that lies tragedy, a woman who refuses to see what has been laid before her, to understand the prophecies recited to her by Aeneas that prove he must push on to Italy and that she does not lie in this destiny. By not acknowledging this information she leads herself to her own demise.

Virgil had a good understanding of the need for great passion in his poem, the scenes with Nisus and Euryalus are paid long attention by the poet, he draws out their pain as well as their joy for the audience, using the tragic death of the characters to swing the emotions of an audience to and fro, to give a rest between the search of a hero for his destiny and show a level of more personal pain and feeling. The culture Virgil wrote from respects emotion and was enthralled by it, with other great authors producing love poetry, Propertius, Ovid, 'All his works fully shared the romantic ethos of his culture.' (S. Farron.) Virgil joined the ranks of these poets with *The Aeneid*, the romantic and destructive love characters possess fascinated Virgil and these episodes appeal to audiences, the culture and Virgil himself. Enabling the poet to include in his poem a contemporary understanding of romance and to allow his audience to exercise a need for cathartic explosion of emotion, swinging between great joy and great hurt.

The emotions of Dido and Aeneas in book four are felt by the audience as well as their positions and backgrounds are known to the audience. There is an understanding between Virgil and his spectators, that he will tell a good tale and bring to an audience all emotions and display to them a range of characters. He constructs a situation for Aeneas to display his dedication, simultaneously forming a set of circumstances that make way for tragedy, for drama in the early parts of the poem. Virgil has been required in his epic to draw out Aeneas' journey so that he may grow into a hero who was great enough to found Rome, along this journey he must be tested by grief and prove his capabilities as a leader. The first few books of the *Aeneid* have covered the excitement of war and constant movement, Aeneas cannot linger too long, and audience would weary of him and Virgil thus generates a commotion, the death of Dido, a tragedy that has been formed for these purposes.

The nature of tragedy is called into question with the Dido-Aeneas affair. What troubles brought Aeneas to Dido, what caused him to leave, the culture of the ancient Romans, the misunderstanding of the characters, what each has encountered in their lives previous to their meeting and what their parting does to each of them. These subjects all lead to the end of the affair between Dido and Aeneas and to later conflicts but therein lies the tragedy and whether this particular chapter in the *Aeneid* qualifies as a tragedy. For tragedy has many formats but doubtless the end is the cruel and undeserved death of a character who perhaps merited more from a life, a poet or an audience.

The nature of tragedy, as laid out by the Greek tragedies, is one that was used by Virgil. He understood Aristotle in his suggestion that tragedy consists of two emotions, 'By means of pity and fear effecting a catharsis of such emotions.' Virgil builds for the listener the emotions of Dido, her lament takes precedence through the final pages of the book and fear for her, her own fear, and great pity is created in the audience. These elements of the story aid the idea of tragedy in the book, tragedy that is a disastrous event ending in loss and distress. The Greek plays by Euripides and Aeschylus lay down an

example of what tragedy is, what was perceived by the ancient peoples as terrible loss, and these ideas carried through into the Roman era.

Tragedy cannot be easily defined, whether a situation is or is not a tragedy by definition cannot be determined through examination but through emotion, what is felt by the audience, the characters who surround the tragic character. It is difficult to say what is tragic as there are no clear divisions in the understanding of the genre and emotions except what is experienced by the audience. Tragedy is a mood, that lights on an audience hearing of a character's unfortunate fate, though it does not belong to the listener is felt by him regardless.

Upon reading the incident between Dido and her lover there is great shock left in the mind of the audience, how can Aeneas have allowed this, how can Dido who was so staid have done this to herself? It is the shock that remains as the audience encounters the following books, not quite able to get Dido out of mind as Aeneas carries on with his journey that suggests tragedy, it lingers around the poem and in an understanding of Aeneas, for his character and behavior played such a role herein.

There are in the Greek plays elements that define a tragedy. The emotions of a tragic play include pity, compassion between characters, grief, pain at a destructive incident occurring to one who does not deserve it, fear, anger, stress, confusion. A list of emotions that are laid before an audience experienced by both audience and characters, but not positive emotions, deep felt sorrow, but passionately felt. If the Greek tragedies help characterize tragedy and all of its meaning better than Dido and her position in book four can indeed be classified as a tragedy, a short one in regards to a play but heartrending nonetheless.

With regards to the physical structure and meaning of tragedy, the odes and chorus that occur in the template plays of the Attic Greeks. These do not exist in this book; it was not designed to mimic a 'tragedy' in its forms but in its emotions. Virgil chose to focus on Dido and play for his audience a scene of great pain, not long and drawn out but a scene of sorrow slotted in between so many others but more poignant and personal to an audience, the loss of love being accessible in the minds of a romantic culture. The tragedy of the piece remains without the traditional structure.

Death has a key role in tragedy, most tragedies contain death, if not of the protagonist then of the supporting characters. Oedipus is the focus of his own horror story but it is his wife/mother Jocasta who dies first though the tragedy lies more in Oedipus' fate than hers, in the Orestia the deaths of Agamemnon and later Clytemnestra are as much tragedy as the dismal lives of their children. This suggests that perhaps it is not the death or the deceased that is tragic but the misery in the lives of those who live. This would note then that the gory death of Dido is not quite tragedy, for she most likely mourned by those close to her but not by Aeneas. The tragedy of this character is not in those around her but in the life she lived that was not always easy and a death that was public, without glory, and a terribly sad end for a queen, a life cut short that could have been lived longer and successfully.

There are to tragedy many pieces, from the structure to the emotions; the same lies in the Aeneid book four. It is the story of the end of a good woman who loved deeply a man out of her reach, fated to greater things than her. Virgil drew from the Greeks before him and fashioned a poem into tragedy drawing on the emotional pieces of conventional tragedy to enhance his own tragic heroine.

Her ending is terribly tragic due to the futility of her passing. She was a young woman, a queen, who would have found suitors elsewhere. She was a victim of the gods whim, her own fate and Aeneas', but she was to die at her own will, for whatever reasons, be they Virgil's literary desires, the whim of a god or fate. Book four becomes tragic because it finishes with death. Any love that does not happen for any reason is a tragedy. Tragedy is defined by the audience who witness the events, to me, book four of the Aeneid is tragic for its loss of hope and a life.

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