

# Study Guide on Virgil's *Aeneid* (Part I: Books I – VI)

“Can anger / Black as this prey on the minds of heaven?” (1.18–19<sup>1</sup>). Consider Juno’s rage as depicted in the opening lines of the *Aeneid* (1.1–96).

- “Tell me the causes now, O Muse, how galled / In her divine pride, and how sore at heart / From her old wound . . .” (1.13–15; see also through 1.27). Why does Juno feel such hatred for Aeneas?
- What effect does Dido’s rage have on the action of Books I through VI—to what extent is she responsible for the ills that befall Aeneas and his crew?
- Is Juno’s anger a real threat to the founding of Rome, or a mere inconvenience? If the founding of Rome is already fated (1.253 ff.), what can she hope to accomplish by intervening? Does she succeed in Books I – VI?

Are Dido’s accusations of Aeneas well-founded? Was it an outrage for Aeneas to leave Carthage?

- Consider Aeneas’ actions with respect to Dido. (Note that she calls him “impious wretch” at 4.851.)
  - How do you view his gifts to her (1.883 ff.)? Dido “burned / With pleasure in the boy and in the gifts” (1.973–4).
  - Aeneas tells the story of Troy’s fall, since “so great desire / Moves you [Dido]” (2.13–14). “The queen . . . all that evening ached / With longing that her heart’s blood fed, a wound / Or inward fire eating her away . . . desire for him gave her no rest” (4.1–7).
- Did Aeneas truly marry Dido? (See 4.177; 4.230–238; 4.432.)
  - Aeneas denies this beginning at 4.467. What commitment does Aeneas have to Dido?
  - Remember that Dido refers to “the marriage bed / On which I came to grief” (4.686–87).
- Does Aeneas leave willingly? Does it make a difference in terms of the justice of Dido’s accusations? Among other passages, consider the following:
  - Aeneas says that he comes because “god drove me to your shores” (3.948).
  - “I sail for Italy not of my own free will” (4.499).
  - “Yet his will stood fast; tears fell in vain” (4.621).

What is the cause of Dido’s death? Is it Aeneas? (Consider 6.616 ff.) Is it the gods? To what extent is Dido herself culpable?

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Random House, Inc., 1990. (All section and line numbers refer to this edition.)



Do you as a reader pity Dido? If so, why would Virgil write an epic in such a way as to evoke pity for Carthage? Consider the following:

- Cupid comes to Dido as Ascanius, Aeneas' son. Dido is influenced by the desire for family.
- Dido questions the justice of the gods (at 4.512 ff., 4.529).
- Note the parallel between Dido's rage upon hearing of Aeneas' departure (4.49 ff.) and Juno's rage at the beginning of the *Aeneid*.

Is Dido a good ruler? What effect does her desire for Aeneas have on Carthage?

What is the place of desire (*amor*) in political life? Are the claims of romantic love and family life compatible with political rule?

Is Aeneas pious? In what sense is Aeneas "duty-bound" (1.519) . . .

- . . . to the gods?
  - Does Aeneas believe the gods are just? "May the Gods— / And surely there are powers that care for goodness, / Surely somewhere justice counts" (1.821–823).
  - What do we learn about Aeneas' piety from his account of how Troy fell? What kind of story does he tell? Is there a growing impiety in his account?
    - "If the gods' will had not been sinister . . ." (2.76).
    - "Protected by our gods no longer . . ." (2.525).
    - "The harsh will of the gods it is, the gods, / That overthrows the splendor of this place / And brings Troy from her height into the dust" (2.793–4).
  - Aeneas prays for a home (3.117); the gods of the hearth speak to Aeneas (3.206 ff.)—"We are the gods who came / Along with you, and joined your cause, when Troy / Went down in flames . . ." (3.217 ff.)
- . . . to the fatherland?
  - How many "foundings" are there in Books I–VI? Consider:
    - Thracian "shore of greed," sacrifice and "gruesome prodigy" (3.23 ff.)
    - Crete (3.183 ff.)
    - Prophecies of the harpies (3.344 ff.)
  - What does Mercury find Aeneas doing (4.352)? Note the rebuke beginning at 4.361.
  - How does Aeneas exercise rule? (See Book V.) How does he compare with Achilles in overseeing games (cf. Homer's *Iliad* XXIII)? Note several references to "fatherly Aeneas" (5.443, 459, 597). What does Book V add to the epic?
- . . . to the family?
  - "paternal love would not allow / Aeneas' mind to rest. . . . Fond father, as always thoughtful of his son" (1.877–1.881)



- “Then come, dear father. Arms around my neck; / I’ll take you on my shoulders, no great weight” (2.921–922).
- Aeneas loses his father (3.938), and gets direction from him in a dream (5.940 ff.).

What is the place of suffering in Aeneas’ journeys (Book III ff.)? Dido claims that she and Aeneas are alike in “hardship and forced wandering” (1.857 ff.)—what is the significance of this shared experience?

What is accomplished by Aeneas’ journey to the underworld?

- What does Aeneas learn in the underworld? (See especially 6.973 ff.)
- What is the significance of Aeneas’ yanking off the bough (6.214 ff. 6.297 ff.)?
- Why are grief, cares, etc. *outside* the entrance to the underworld (6.376)?
- Explain why Aeneas leaves through the Ivory Gate (6.1211–18).



## Study Guide on Virgil's *Aeneid* (Part II: Books VII – XII)

What parallels are there between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? Consider how Virgil's project is similar to Homer's, and how it is different. Remember Virgil's first line: "I sing of warfare and a man at war" (1.1)—is one part of the *Aeneid* an imitation of the *Iliad*, and another of the *Odyssey*? If so, where would you place the division?

Recall the "mandate": "Roman, remember . . . / To pacify, to impose the rule of law, to spare the conquered, battle down the proud" (6.1151–54). How does Aeneas measure up to this standard in the last six books of the *Aeneid*? Consider:

- Political actions:
  - Alliance with the Arcadians.
  - Agrees to single combat. Note the conditions if he wins (12.252 ff.).
  - Aeneas wants to keep the pact (12.427 ff.).
- Instances of pity and pitilessness:
  - "Profound pity" (10.1148).
  - No pity at 10.745 ff; "pitiless heart" at 10.780 ff; Aeneas mocks fallen enemy at 10.826.
  - Should Aeneas be moved by pity in these scenarios?
- In the final encounter with Turnus: Is Aeneas justified?
  - Why exactly does Aeneas kill Turnus? Is he justified in doing so?
  - Aeneas kills him in rage. Recall the rage of other characters: Juno, Dido, Turnus. How does Aeneas' rage compare with theirs?

What kind of rule does Jupiter exercise? What are its implications?

- Does he rule wisely? Does he rule justly? Consider:
  - Jupiter's rule in the council of the gods (beginning of Book X).
  - The debate between Juno and Jupiter (12.1072 ff.).
- Why does Jupiter intervene at 11.984?
- What light does Jupiter's rule shed on the founding of Rome? Why does he forbid Juno to interfere further (12.1092)?

Is Rome founded in this story? If yes, in what sense? If not, what is founded? Consider the ways in which Virgil describes the future Rome:

- In the underworld: What vision of Rome is evoked by the description found in the underworld? What kind of order will be established if Aeneas succeeds? Note the conditions Aeneas prescribes if he wins in single combat (12.252).



- On the shield of Aeneas: What does the shield tell us about the man bearing it? Does the shield in some way reveal Aeneas' interior battle? How does this in turn shed light on Rome?
- What does the shield tell us about Rome's future (8.850 ff.)? (See also Cato and Cataline at 8.906 ff.) Why is Actium at the center? Is the shield in some way a representation of the whole of the *Aeneid*?

Was the killing of Turnus necessary for the founding of Rome? Recall the "founding" of the knife in Turnus (12.1295).

Does Virgil's *Aeneid* teach its audience (including modern readers, ancient readers, the Emperor Augustus) anything about the rule of Rome?

- Does it offer a normative vision of how Romans should rule? Does it depict Rome falling short of that standard?
- Does Virgil seem to be more in favor of the Roman Republic of days past, or of the contemporary Empire and Principate?
- Is the empire "natural," according to Virgil? Remember Jupiter's declaration: "For these [Romans] I set no limits, world or time, / But make the gift of empire without end" (1.376–77).
- What teaching does Virgil impart about the way human beings should live and a ruler should rule? What should be the relation between reason and passion? Is there tension between them?

Compare the rule of Aeneas with the rule of Latinus. What might Virgil be trying to convey in contrasting these two rulers?

How are the women of the *Aeneid* alike? How are they different?

- Does there seem to be a common theme of "disorderliness"—Aeneas with Dido, Latinus with Amata, Turnus with Camilla, and even Jupiter with Juno?
- Can Amata be seen as the cause of the war (12.817 ff.)?

As a character, how does Aeneas compare with Dido and Turnus? Are we meant to pity Dido? Are we meant to admire Turnus? Is Aeneas a likable character?

What is the role of Fortune in this epic? Compare and contrast this with the role of Fate. Among other passages, consider the following:

- The Fates will find a way (10.157).
- Turnus claims that Fortune favors men who dare (10.393).
- On Fate, gods, Fortune (12.915).

**Suggested use:** This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Virgil's *Aeneid*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

