

Christopher Eng

CLA396 Myths of Rome

Rosemary C. Condella

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Final Paper:

When assessing the relationship between gods and men as depicted in roman myths, and how these myths aid men and women in their understanding and closeness to the gods, a great text to analyze is Vergil's Aeneid, particularly book 6 which covers Aeneas' trip to the Underworld, as well as having many other heavily used themes throughout the other myths about the roman gods. Through this part of Aeneas's story we are able to get a glimpse at the relationship between gods and men and gain a better understanding of the roles that these myths help to establish in roman society. Through this story we also learn about the role of fate and how those who are tied with the gods will and have a set fate must bend to the influence that the gods command of them that being guidance, warnings and insights given to these people by the gods in order for them to fulfill their destiny that was predetermined for them. The intertwined relationship between gods and men, where the gods act as benefactors, aiding mortals in their journeys and empowering them to achieve their destiny.

At the start of book 6 Aeneas reaches the shores of Cumae, Italy where the first thing he does is search for "the high, holy places of Apollo" (130) where he wishes to seek guidance from Sibyl, a priestess at the temple, and while at the temple he also promises to make another temple for apollo. This shows the importance of the relation between Aeneas and Apollo and how dedicated man is to the gods. It seems almost like

a give and take situation as once he praises Apollo with his prayers the doors will open up for him to the temple which is very symbolic to me showing that through their trust and worship of the gods the Romans believed that many doors would open for them. This Idea will be continually built on as the book goes on.

As we move forward in the story he is also granted a prophecy by the god Apollo who takes over Sibyl's body to deliver it to Aeneas, he is told of the future, and how he will shape the future of his people and how he must first enter the underworld by bringing Sibyl a golden branch. Destiny plays a huge role in Aeneas's journey, despite being told of the terrible wars ahead he presses forward with the trip to the underworld as he knows he must accept his fate. To help find the golden bow he is guided by his "mothers birds" (136) those being two white doves which show him the way. Aeneas thanks his mother saying "you, Goddess and Mother, do not fail me in these doubtful times" (136), one again reaffirming his relation to the gods. His mother the goddess Venus shows that she is supporting him in his destiny, and serves to underscore the divine assistance and protection provided by the gods to fulfill one's destiny. Venus aiding Aeneas in finding the golden branch not only demonstrates her maternal love and concern for her son but also signifies the divine favor bestowed upon him. It reaffirms the belief that Aeneas is specifically chosen by the gods and receives their support in his mission to establish Rome. Aeneas's personal connection to the divine and his lineage as a descendant of the gods proves helpful and could be used by the Romans to legitimize their lineage as connected to the divine. The symbolism of Venus assisting Aeneas in finding the golden tree branch highlights the divine protection, guidance, and favor that play a crucial role in the fulfillment of one's destiny.

The next two points in the story that shows Aeneas's relationship with the gods and how that relationship shapes the ways in which he acts is when he sees Dido and his father in the underworld. These two hold particular importance to Aeneas as Dido was the one he feels the most guilt over leaving to fulfill his destiny, and his father is the one he most wants to honor by completing his mission. When meeting Dido "He broke into tears and spoke to her With tender love" (145) showing the remorse and guilt he feels about leaving her in Carthage. As she took her own life after he left her. Dido's presence in the Underworld, serves as a haunting reminder of the impact his choice to pursue his destiny had on her and reinforces the lingering guilt he carries. By encountering Dido in the Underworld, Aeneas is directly confronted with the consequences of his choice to prioritizing his destiny over personal relationships. Showing his loyalty to his fate and the gods' plans for his future. However, he says "I swear by the stars, by the powers above, And by whatever faith lies in the depths below, It was not my choice to leave your land, my Queen." (145) This is a sad thing to see as it seems like he greatly regrets his decision of leaving her and perhaps wishes he could have stayed if the gods didn't have plans for him. This shows that the relationship between men and gods is not necessarily a two way street and once fated to do something by the gods there's little one can do to resist it.

Despite Aeneas's regret over Dido, the meeting with his father is one that has the opposite effect on his outlook on his fate as he is joyful in hearing his father praising his "devotion" to the "long, hard road" laid out for him by his fate. (153) This encounter emphasizes connection between Aeneas and the souls of his ancestors, highlighting the weight of tradition and the legacy he carries, not only to his mortal but also his divine

legacy. As Aeneas interacts with his father, he is reminded of his lineage and the responsibility he has to fulfill his fate. Much like his mother, Aeneas's father offers much needed guidance and answers Aeneas's questions while also telling him of the future of their descendants, and the golden age that awaits their people if he continues along with his destiny. The fate revealed to Aeneas by his father, Anchises, in the Underworld profoundly impacts his commitment to fulfilling his destiny in multiple ways: one way is that it emphasizes the significance of his mission, blessed and guided by the gods, and describes Aeneas's role in shaping the future of Rome. It also emphasizes the achievements made by his descendants and the great Roman empire that is to come, instilling in him a sense of purpose for his mission in laying the foundations for what is to come. Furthermore, the prophecy conveys the long-term perspective, showing that he is only a piece in the story that is to come, providing him with a grand vision of Rome's future, and preparing Aeneas for the challenges ahead, and solidifying his understanding of the gods' guiding hand in his destiny.

For the Romans the myth of Aeneas as the leader and founder of Rome instills a deep sense of duty and legitimacy as through his connection with the divine and fate shows the Roman connection. All of the guidance and help Aeneas receives from the gods is akin to the gods aiding Rome itself showing their favor to the Romans as the chosen peoples. The myth described in book 6 illustrates the importance of trust, worship, and dedication to the gods in Roman culture. Aeneas's encounters with Apollo, Venus, Dido, and his father shape his understanding of his destiny and solidify his commitment to fulfilling it, highlighting the role of divine assistance, guidance, and favor in the fulfillment of one's fate.

Source:

Virgil. Aeneid (Hackett Classics). Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Kindle
Edition.