

Manjusha Chava

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Section A

The Importance of Nature in the **Aeneid**

Nature is an essential aspect of human societies and civilization. Primitive perceptions and concepts regarding the philosophy of life by early hominids developed from their observations of phenomenon occurring in nature. This resulted in nature imagery because of the way humans were able to relate the patterns found in nature to everyday life. Nature imagery has been constantly incorporated into numerous works of literature. Book Four of the **Aeneid**, written by Virgil in c. 19 BC, uses nature imagery to describe the character traits of the central characters Dido and Aeneas, as well as the complexity and dramatization of the plot.

Virgil's use of nature imagery in the **Aeneid** is beneficial in developing the character of Dido. The description of her personality commences at the beginning of the book, comparing her with "A heedless hind hit by an arrow when a shepherd drives for game with darts... she roams the forests... the shaft of death still clinging to her side." The comparison between a wild deer and Dido in these lines demonstrates how her character is virtuous and pure, just as deer are commonly attributed to innocence and rawness. The attack of the deer by the shepherd is symbolic of a significant misfortune in Dido's life that suddenly altered her state of being. Regardless of Dido's hardship, she continues on with her life with a deep wound in her heart, parallel to the deer's ongoing jaunt through the forest despite an injury. The use of vivid imagery pertaining to nature illustrates Dido's character traits, which is important in the advancement of the story. Another instance of formation of character described by nature imagery is when Dido "shuns the light of day, deserts [Aeneas's] eyes." Light is an aspect of nature that is commonly

symbolic of hope and optimism. However, Dido's shunning of light, and thus hope or optimism, describes her state of mind and her way of coping with misfortunes in her life. The second piece of the quote refers to the action of Dido deserting Aeneas's eyes. This is a reference to nature because the dryness of the desert is being compared to Dido's characteristics. She is unforgiving towards Aeneas in this scene and portrays no emotion or vivacity, which is analogous to the aridness and lack of vitality in deserts. Similarly, the line "alone above the housetops, death its song, an owl often complains and draws its long slow call into a wailing lamentation," expresses a comparable use of nature imagery to accurately describe Dido's emotional state for the reader. The correlation between the mourning of Aeneas's departure by Dido and an owl's melancholy sounds depicts the degree of grief in which Dido is enduring. The use of nature imagery to describe Dido's character offers a clear illustration of her personality and character traits throughout the poem.

Nature analogies are also utilized to effectively describe the character of Aeneas throughout the **Aeneid**. The most prominent use of nature imagery is found in an epic simile describing Aeneas's inability to be persuaded quickly:

"a stout oak tree whose wood is full of years; the roar is shattering, the trunk is shaken, and high branches scatter on the ground; but it still grips the rocks; as steeply as it thrusts its crown into the upper air, so deep the roots it reaches down to Tartarus"

The copious amounts of nature imagery in this epic simile is vital in describing the control Aeneas has when he rejects Dido's pleas to stay with her. His heart and emotions are fragmented and damaged just like the body of the tree being broken and scattered all over. Nevertheless, Aeneas is able to refrain from being misled by his feelings and desires, ergo leaving Dido once and for all. Aeneas's roots were so strong that even the pleas of Dido, which

are represented by the “north winds” that “strain against each other to root out with blasts,” could not persuade the mighty Aeneas. In contrast, Aeneas is also described as confused and broken. This is particularly evident in the line “he burns to flee... His wits are split, they shift here, there.” He finds himself in an internal conflict, divided between two life-altering decisions. The aspects of nature in this description indirectly symbolize a tree, where the tree is burning, and the branches of his wits are diverging. The roots of the tree are not deeply established into the ground, which signifies Aeneas’s helplessness in deciding the next phase of his journey. This illustration of Aeneas at his most vulnerable state notably contrasts with the prior description of him at his finest. The differences in the analogies between a tree and Aeneas portray the change in his character traits throughout the poem. Imagery pertaining to natural surroundings are used to describe Aeneas’s characteristics and to create a vivid sensory experience for the reader.

Connections between nature imagery and plot are made frequently throughout the **Aeneid** to create intricacy. Primarily, Aeneas’s men are compared to ants in an epic simile describing the bustle of the crewmen:

“one could see them as, streaming, they rushed down from all the city: even as ants,
remembering the winter... the black file swarms across the fields... some strain against the
great grains with their shoulders”

This demonstrates the organized scramble of the crewmen by relating them to the organizational structure of ants. Just like ants, these crewmen are hard at work to prepare the materials needed to begin their voyage from Carthage. The use of this nature imagery to describe the crewmen helps the reader visualize the hurriedness and activity in this scene, complementing the flow of the plot. Another example of nature imagery used to describe plot is found when Juno officiates the wedding of Dido and Aeneas. As soon as Juno gives the signal of marriage,

“lightning fires flash, the upper air is witness to their mating, and from the highest hill tops shout the nymphs.” The use of such nature imagery illustrates the vibrant setting to the reader. The lightning fires and mating of air are attributed to the idea of weddings and love as being natural occurrences in life, hence the use of nature imagery. The personification used in this nature-themed comparison helps convey the significance of the wedding to the reader. Furthermore, Dido’s restlessness due to the departure of Aeneas creates climax in the plot and is described using powerful imagery pertaining to nature:

“across the earth the tired bodies were tasting tranquil sleep; the woods and savage waters were resting... when all the fields are still, and animals and colored birds... find their home... But the sorrowing Phoenician; she cannot submit to sleep... again love rises, surges in her; she wavers on the giant tide of anger.”

The description of forests and bodies, especially bodies of water, as changing from unrestrained to tired and controlled at night indicates the power of darkness and the serenity associated with it. The movement of animals and fields is no exception to the influence of the night. In contrast, Dido’s anxiety leaves her unable to sleep, despite the darkness and tranquility of the night. Her thoughts and feelings of love and anger deny her the ability to sleep. The description of her thoughts and feelings mimic the movement of water. Her love rises like the waves of the ocean, overwhelms her mind, then settles down in order to make way for a new tide of anger which suddenly engulfs her. The many emotions overpowering her mind contrast with the peacefulness of night. Nature imagery emphasizes the significance of the internal conflict Dido is facing by contrasting it to observations found in nature that are serene and quiet. This helps progress the climax of the plot because it slowly builds tension and dramatizes Dido’s

feelings to create empathy. The construction and development of the plot rely heavily on the use of nature imagery to create tension and drama.

The utilization of nature rooted imagery in the **Aeneid** describes both the complexity and dramatization of the plot, as well as the characteristics of the Dido and Aeneas. Virgil's idealistic perception of nature is reflected in his analogies and similes throughout the book. His incorporation of such tactics into his works of literature stimulated other writers to do the same. Literature written after Virgil continued to inspire its readers solely from the use of these approaches. Human observations and analysis of both nature and nature inspired literature are the reasons for development in knowledge. This acquired information, as well as human relations and interactions with nature, are the reasons for both the growth in the study of science and philosophy, and the progression of human kind.