



Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book II

Study Questions

The whole poem: first thoughts

If it is true that all human culture is a response somehow to the fact of our mortality, then the epic genre puts this concern on the grandest stage. Among the questions posed by Virgil's *Aeneid* are the following:

- Can we control our own lives?
- How do we process the past?
- Should we fear the future?
- How do we relate to our communities?
- Whose needs take priority?
- Where do we find our identity?
- What is the point of war?
- Does the cosmos have a moral code?
- What does it mean to die well?
- How should we remember the dead?

Question 1: As you read the poem for the first time in its entirety, which of these questions strikes you as the most insistent?

Question 2: Which question does the poem address most clearly?

Question 3: Which questions are left begging at the poem's close?

Question 4: Can you think of a modern literary work which confronts these classical epic issues?

Question 5: Which question do you feel deserves more attention in our/ your world today?



The whole poem

Question 1: How effective is Aeneas as a leader in the poem?

Question 2: What is the significance of the father-son relationship in the *Aeneid*?

Question 3: What do the gods of the *Aeneid* contribute to the poem?

Question 4: What is the poem's relationship to the political settlement of Augustus?

Question 5: How important is the descent into the Underworld for the development of Aeneas' character?

Question 6: What does Aeneas/ the poem achieve by the killing of Turnus in Book 12?

Book 1

Question 1: How is Aeneas/ Venus/ Jupiter/ Juno/ Dido/ Aeolus/ Cupid presented in *Aeneid* 1?

Question 2: How is family/ dynasty/ ancestors portrayed in *Aeneid* 1?

Question 3: What, if any, are the limitations of Aeneas in Book 1? Would a contemporary Roman audience have responded differently to these than a modern audience?

Question 4: How effectively does Book 1 prepare us for the tragedy of Dido which culminates in Book 4?

Question 5: What do Dido and Aeneas have in common?

Question 6: At what points in Book 1 could Aeneas have abandoned or failed to fulfil his destiny?



Question 7: How much free will to determine his future does Aeneas have?

Question 8: Other than Aeneas, who is the most interesting character in Book 1?

Question 9: Compare Juno and Venus' reasons for wanting to see Aeneas and Dido married.

Question 10: To what extent is the opening to the *Aeneid* politicized?

Question 11: How could divine intervention in Book 1 be read metaphorically?

Question 12: What is the role of Carthage in Book 1?

Question 13: Do you need to be a student of Roman history to appreciate the opening of the *Aeneid*?

Question 14: Why does Virgil begin his poem *in medias res*?

Question 15: What does the poem's proem (first 11 lines) achieve?

Question 16: Where is the voice of Virgil the poet most prominent in Book 1?

Question 17: What sorts of irony are at play in the poem's first book?

Question 18: What literary precedents or precepts does Virgil harness, and to what effect?

Question 19: How does the opening of Virgil's poem set itself apart from those earlier openings, which most of his readers knew by heart?

Question 20: Which parts of Book 1 would Aeneas have chosen to read to Augustus and why?

Book 2



Sinon and Laocoon

Question 1: What gives Aeneas' re-telling of this episode its emotional intensity?

Question 2: How does the speaking style of Laocoon compare to that of Sinon? How do their oratorical styles suit their personalities?

Question 3: How does Sinon make use of Ulysses?

Question 4: How would you characterise the collective Trojan mindset?

Question 5: Who is more guilty of deception in Book 2: Sinon or the gods?

Question 6: 'Book 2 basically amounts to an indictment of Greek scheming and sacrilege.' How far do you agree?

Question 7: What makes the fall of Troy especially degrading for the Trojans?

The characterisation of Aeneas

Question 1: "Listening to Aeneas's story, Dido must have been rather unimpressed by him." Do you agree?

Question 2: In *Aeneid 2*, why does Virgil not allow Aeneas any significant martial achievement?

Question 3: In reading *Aeneid 2*, how should we understand the idea that Virgil is creating a Roman hero?

Question 4: "The various cameo appearances in *Aeneid 2* put Aeneas in the shade." To what extent is this a fair judgement?



Question 5: How does Virgil shield Aeneas from the charge of cowardice, for fleeing the city?

Narrative technique

Question 1: In *Aeneid 2*, how successfully does Virgil convey the atmosphere of war?

Question 2: How does Virgil sustain the reader's interest in the sack of Troy?

Question 3: How effectively does Virgil use the first person in *Aeneid 2*'s narrative?

Question 4: Show how Virgil uses similes to enhance the narrative in *Aeneid 2*.

The supernatural

Question 1: "Unremittingly bleak." Is this a fair assessment of the moral universe in *Aeneid 2*?

Question 2: Discuss the presentation of the divine in *Aeneid 2*.

Question 3: In *Aeneid 2*, does the role of fate suggest that religion is futile?

Question 4: Beyond the Olympian gods, what role does the supernatural play in *Aeneid 2*?

Question 5: "The divine plan for Rome makes sense out of all the suffering." Is that verdict on *Aeneid 2* satisfactory?

Imagery and wider themes

Question 1: Discuss the presentation of familial relationships in *Aeneid 2*.

Question 2: How important are filial relationships in *Aeneid 2*?



Question 3: Why does Virgil use so much natural imagery in *Aeneid 2*?

Question 4: “For all *Aeneid 2*’s machismo, its presentation of the feminine is more interesting.” Discuss.

Question 5: Discuss the role of light and dark in *Aeneid 2*.

Question 6: Do the Trojans, by their gullibility, deserve their fate?

Question 7: ‘One man’s *fraus* is another man’s *consilium*.’ Does *Aeneid 2* corroborate this claim?

Challenge questions

Question 1: ‘Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried.’ (Walter Benjamin, ‘Excavation and Memory’, 1932). **How far is Virgil’s *Aeneid* a work of remembrance?**

Question 2: ‘The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way.’ (E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 1927). **How far does this apply to Virgil’s *Aeneid*?**

Question 3: Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (1976, p65) – ‘For all the magnificence of the *Aeneid*, one senses an enormous moral vacuum in the poem. Men do what they do because they are told that is right or necessary, not because they believe in it.’ **Is this a fair assessment of the poem’s first four books?**