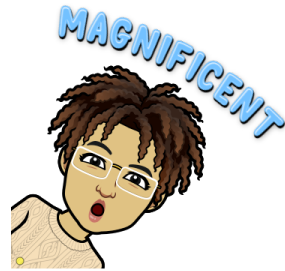


5/6/2021

Great Books: Aeneid

Mrs. McCowan



Enchanted By Picture Books

Why are millions of high schoolers across the nation forced into reading ancient epics such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*, when they don't want to? In the writing of the legendary epic *The Aeneid*, Virgil masterfully displays many powerful and compelling literary techniques. After the city of Troy was burned to the ground, Aeneas and the refugees of Troy set off on a legendary adventure to found the new city that would later be known as the roots of the vast Roman empire. Through the pages of *The Aeneid*, Virgil utilizes slow revelation of details, employs similes/metaphors, and constructs strong characters to produce apprehension.

Using strong characters in a compelling and powerful way, Virgil builds Aeneas into a pious and robust character for whom readers are nervous when he gets into danger. Displaying many powerful moments of Aeneas' leadership qualities, Virgil portrays a stern yet compassionate man whose care for his troops and people produce a caring and strong leader. "Your prizes are yours," said captain Aeneas firmly, "they all stand fast, young comrades. No one alters our ranked list of winners now. Just let me offer a consolation prize to a luckless man, a friend without a fault" [164]. Showing the fullness of his strong leadership qualities, Aeneas decides instead of giving into a

seemingly right decision, he stands firm on his original words, and to show compassion on the deserving one. After meeting queen Dido in the underworld, Aeneas proves his loyalty to the Olympian gods by obediently traveling to Hades in order to learn the future of his people. "Yes, the will of the gods, that drives me through the shadows now, these mouldering places so forlorn, this deep unfathomed night--their decrees have forced me on" [197]. Through the Aeneid, readers become aware of the awesome respect and reverence that Aeneas holds to his gods. Virgil never ceases to build and mold Aeneas into a strong character whose life reflects the very meaning of the words pious, passionate, and personable, so that when he experiences danger, readers are apprehensive for him.

In the midst of the war-strewn battlefield of ancient Rome, the similes and metaphors stand alone upon a hill, overlooking a sea of bland examples and poor vocabulary, trumpeting skill and writing forte. Virgil does all this to heighten readers' anxiety. When poisoned by the gods to craziness, the queen of the Latins goes mad in her anger at her husband for promising their daughter to the foreign Trojans in marriage. "Wild as a top, spinning under a twisted whip when boys, obsessed with their play, drive it round an empty court, the whip spinning it round in bigger rings and the boys hovering over it, spellbound, wonderstruck..." [226] Using many strong similes through his work, the skill with which Virgil compares the crazed queen to an out of control top is masterfully written. In the midst of the siege on the Trojan's wall, Turnus, the captain of the Latins, in his fury and wrath, stalked the Trojan's wall looking to strike his enemies. "As a wolf prowling in wait around some crowded sheepfold, bearing the wind and rain in the dead of night, howls at chinks in the fence, and the lambs keep bleating on, snug

beneath their dams. The wolf rages, desperate, how can he maul a quarry out of reach? Exhausted, frenzied with building hunger, starved so long, his jaws parched for blood” (268). Seeking his prey like a wolf seeking a lamb is a fantastic example that perfectly fits the situation. Displaying the power and robustness of similes and metaphors, Virgil expertly spreads unique and compelling comparisons through the pages of the Aeneid to increase the tension.

Mastering writing techniques, the author draws readers in by skillfully weaving a small story into complicated and heart-breaking moments through masterfully-executed slow revelation of details. In the drawn out story of two friends Nisus and Euryalus, who leave the camp at night, in order to wreak havoc upon the sleeping Trojans, Virgil painfully writes the drawn out tale. “Heading toward the enemy camp, destined to die... Nisus already picks his way, wheeling groping back through the whole deceptive wood... He threw himself on his lifeless friend and there in the still of death found peace at last” (277-279-281). In this story, the author relays it to the reader in great detail, causing the reader to be drawn into the story and to fall in love with these two characters who die in the end. Over the last eight pages of the Aeneid, Virgil slowly draws out the chase and death of Turnus, by the hand of Aeneas. “But Aeneas, the great commander, hearing the name of Turnus, deserts the walls... All hot pursuit, Aeneas brandishes high his spear... In the same breath, blazing with wrath he plants his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy’s heart” (378-386). Showing exemplary writing technique, Virgil builds upon the intensity of the scene by drawing out the death of Turnus, thus pulling on many heart strings and truly evoking the emotions needed in this

epic. As seen when the author uses slow revelation of details, Virgil ceaselessly works his simple stories into complicated webs of agonizing emotions.

As seen through the Aeneid, the author utilizes slow revelation of details, employs similes/metaphors, and constructs strong characters to produce apprehension. As valuable as all the literary devices used by Virgil are, his strong and relatable characters surpass all else, because the extent to which he develops these fictitious people, and evokes concern for them, is truly marvelous. In conclusion, the reason high schoolers are forced to read ancient epics is because they will develop a deep and somewhat unfathomable appreciation for the ancient books, instead of remaining enchanted by picture books.

Works Cited

Virgil, and Robert Fagles. *The Aeneid*. New York ; London, Penguin, 2010.