

(i) Dido – 2018

“Temples and prayers are no use to a woman who is madly in love.”

(Virgil, *Aeneid* Book 4)

(a) What was Dido’s situation before Aeneas and the Trojans arrived in Carthage?

Before Aeneas arrived in Carthage, Dido and her people were exiles from a place called Tyre. They fled after Dido’s brother Pygmalion had her husband Sychaeus murdered in secret in exchange for money. Her brother hid the truth of his murder from a grieving Dido and made her believe that her husband would eventually return.

However, in a dream Dido received a message from the ghost of her late husband. He told her what had transpired and insisted that she leave Tyre for the land which was now Dido’s city of Carthage. His ghost led her to a secret hoard of gold and silver which she would use to buy the amount of land “covered by a bulls hide.” Dido then gathered all those who would oppose to her brother and set sail for Carthage where they would build their new home.

Upon his arrival, Aeneas is introduced to a beautiful, independent, and strong leader who's overseeing the building of her city, delegating jobs, and carrying out justice. While she is defending her shores, Dido is incredibly hospitable to visitors when she realizes that they aren't a threat to her city. Dido has also already rejected a couple of marriage proposals from neighboring chiefs. She wishes to rule alone and honor her late husband's memory.

(b) Do you agree with the view that Dido was an innocent victim of Aeneas and the Gods? Give reasons for your answer.

I agree that Dido is an innocent victim of the gods desire for Aeneas to fulfill his destiny. Firstly, Jupiter sends Mercury to inspire her to welcome Aeneas and his crew with open arms and good intentions as they only wish to continue their journey to Italy. This is the beginning of the end for Dido.

Aeneas' mother Venus is worried that Juno may interfere and turn Dido against him. To prevent this, she sends her other son Cupid down disguised as Ascanius, Aeneas' son, to fill the Queen's heart with infatuation for Aeneas. This is incredibly destructive for Dido as her judgment becomes completely clouded because she is so enchanted by him.

Juno is also to blame for Dido's downfall. As she does not wish for Aeneas to reach Rome, she attempts to scheme with Venus to marry Dido to Aeneas. Venus agrees to the match but only if they have the support of Jupiter. However, Juno goes ahead without consulting him. When Aeneas and Dido are forced into a cave during a storm, Juno sanctifies the two in 'marriage' however Virgil makes it unclear whether the two were truly married. Dido is convinced however, and she "surrendered to her desires" which would have dire consequences for the queen.

For a period, the two remained together; Dido begins neglecting her duties as queen just as Aeneas neglects his destiny. Jupiter is not pleased with these events and sends Mercury to Aeneas to compel him to leave Carthage. Pious and dutiful Aeneas decides that it is what he must do for his son and his people. He immediately prepares to leave and heads towards Dido to deliver the news. Aeneas' duty-bound personality will prove catastrophic when it comes to his relationship with Dido.

When he arrives, Dido has already learned of his plans to leave from Rumor. She is in a lovestruck frenzy and calls Aeneas a traitor and reminds him that all of Libya hates her for her relationship with him. Aeneas coldly responds that it is the will of the gods, and they were not technically married which only infuriates her more. Aeneas hastily leaves to escape and attack. Dido, driven mad with love and guilt for betraying her husband Sychaeus' memory, kills herself on a burning funeral pyre of all of Aeneas belongings he left behind.

Overall, I think it's very clear that Dido was an innocent who suffered a terrible fate because of the gods and her connection to Aeneas. The once strong and confident queen is manipulated and destroyed by the gods who use her like a pawn for their own intentions. Aeneas' complete and utter investment in his god given destiny and in his unshakable obedience to them also massively impacts her fate and dooms their relationship.