

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 9: Aeneas: Humanity and Divinity, Might and Piety



We have seen that Aeneas, like Hercules, Perseus, and Theseus is half human, half divine. However, unlike these heroes who had divine fathers, it was Aeneas mother, Venus, who was divine – his father was Anchises. When Virgil wants to emphasise Aeneas' humanity therefore it is natural that he should mention his father Anchises.

Aeneas' response to the horrors he encounters in the underworld shows his humanity. He is terrified (*subita trepidus formidine* L290) by the sight of the monsters – a very human reaction. He tries, as any human might, to attack them with his sword but is restrained by the Sybil who reminds him that this is useless as they are just “thin spirits” (*tenuis vitas*).

Then Aeneas is moved (*motus*) in a human way at the sight of the unburied souls crowding the shores of the Styx. In reply to his questions about them the Sybil addresses him as *Anchisa generate, deum certissima proles*, (L322). Is this because he is sorrowing as *Anchisa generate*, (human) and she wants to remind him that he is *deum certissima proles*?

Aeneas human pity for the unburied souls is indicated again at his response to the Sybil's speech: *constitit Anchisa satus et vestigia pressit* (L331). Virgil also adds emphasis by means of a technique called **Theme and Variation** (repetition of an idea in different words): *constitit* and *vestigia pressit* both mean “he stopped.”

He is *Miseratusque animo*. His human hesitation and empathy is emphasised by Virgil's mention of his human father.

Although he is part human, Aeneas is a hero. He is *ingentem Aeneam* (L413). This description of his physical size not only contrasts him with the insubstantial souls Charon clears off his boat to accommodate him but also emphasises his greatness compared with normal humans – his half divine nature gives him more than human stature.

Troius Aeneas, pietate insignis et armis (L403) the Sybil calls him and she is respectful in her description. She calls him *imago tantae pietatis* (L405) and this contrasts with her sarcastic remarks about Cerberus and even Pluto and Persephone themselves. *Pietas* involves duty to family, the gods and to one's country. In the depiction of Aeneas on a Roman coin above we see him with Anchises on his back (family), carrying the household gods *Lares* (gods) setting out from Troy to found Rome (country). Virgil was aiming to make parallels in his readers' minds with Augustus, his patron.

“...the Aeneid was probably mainly propaganda, supposedly in support of the new Augustan regime. After the fall of the Roman Republic the people would be wary of a sole leader, and so by connecting himself to the figure of Aeneas through lineage Augustus can show that he embodies a

value [*Pietas*] so important to the Roman sense of national identity. Augustus himself restored temples, settled peace in Rome for the first time in decades, and many of his new laws focused on family values of marriage, and children. He showed himself to have a faithful and good wife, and didn't stand for things such as adultery, even exiling his daughter for the crime. Piety was a hugely significant value for him.”¹

In these lines then was Virgil depicting Aeneas as “the armed representative of *pietas* boldly stepping out where few have stepped before... the predecessor of Augustus as he appears in the statue at Prima Porta”²?

Notice the statue has bare feet. This was only allowed for statues of gods.



Exam style questions:

- 1 *'Anchisa generate, deum certissima proles,*
- 2 *Cocytis stagna alta vides Stygiamque paludem,*
- 3 *di cuius iurare timent et fallere numen.*
- 4 *haec omnis, quam cernis, inops inhumataque turba est;*
- 5 *portitor ille Charon; hi, quos vehit unda, sepulti.*
- 6 *nec ripas datur horrendas et rauca fluenta*
- 7 *transportare prius quam sedibus ossa quierunt.*
- 8 *centum errant annos volitantque haec litora circum;*
- 9 *tum demum admissi stagna exoptata revisunt.'*
- 10 *constitit Anchisa satus et vestigia pressit*
- 11 *multa putans sortemque animo miseratus iniquam.*

1. Translate lines 1-3 above. [5]
 2. *haec omnis, quam cernis, inops inhumataque turba est*
Why are some souls not allowed on Charon's boat? [1]
 3. Write out and scan line 11.
 4. How does Virgil emphasise Aeneas' action in line 10? [2]
- Answers on the next page.

Non exam question:

How does Virgil's idea of Roman *pietas* compare with the Bible's ideas of how we should live our lives?

1 Amy Dakin <https://www.quora.com/Aeneid-How-and-why-was-Aeneas-pious>

2 MacLennan, Keith *Virgil Aeneid VI* (London, 2003) p.126.

1. Son of Anchises, certain offspring of divinity, you see the deep pools of Cocytus and the Stygian marsh, by whose divinity the gods fear to swear falsely.

2. They are not allowed on the boat if they are unburied.

3. *mūltā pŭt|āns sōr|tēmque ānīm|ō mīsēr|ātūs ĩn|īquām*

Working:

Elision: *multa putans sortemque animo miseratus iniquam.*

Last foot: *multa putans sortemque animo miseratus in|iquam.*

Fifth foot: *multa putans sortemque animo miser|ātūs ĩn|iquam.*

Remaining syllables: 11 so three dactyls and one spondee.

No diphthongs. Vowels before two consonants: *mūlta putāns sōrtemque animo miser|ātūs ĩn|iquam.*

Final *o* is long. This gives the fourth foot: *mūlta putāns sōrtemque anim|ō mīsēr|ātūs ĩn|iquam.*

First foot must be a dactyl to avoid two spondees. Therefore the spondee must be the third foot.

Final syllable short since there is no reason for it to be long.

4. Virgil adds emphasis by means of **Theme and Variation** *constitit* and *vestigia pressit* both mean “he stopped.”