

Student Essay on Of Love and Duty in The Aeneid

Of Love and Duty in The Aeneid by Virgil

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Essay

Women in The Aeneid held love in a higher light than duty, as opposed to Aeneas, who felt that duty always comes first. The first instance shown of the love of women neglected is in Book II, as Aeneas and his family are fleeing the city. It is not that Aeneas did not love his wife, but rather his focus on his duty of fleeing the city caused him not even to notice when or how Creusa disappeared. "Never did I look back/Or think to look for her," (p. 59) he said, after the realization that she is gone. His love for Creusa led him to go back and search for her, but duty had already prevailed. When Aeneas found Creusa, she was a ghost.

Another great example of Aeneas holding duty more dearly than love is explained in Book IV. Juno hoped her plan of love for Dido and Aeneas was flawless. This goddess thought that they would make love and be married, causing Aeneas to stay on the island due to his love of Dido. Aeneas, however, repressed any personal desire he might have had when duty called, showing once again his obedience to the duty of founding Troy, as is expressed by Dido when she says in lines 419-421, "Can our love/Not hold you, can the pledge we gave not hold you,/Can Dido not, now sure to die in pain"" (p. 106) Aeneas seems incapable of emotion, apologizing, but leaving Dido to suffer.

Although Dido is portrayed as a victim, any man with such a dedication to a dream as Aeneas should be held in high regard. It is clear that love and duty cannot fit together, but instead a choice must be made. If one is anything like Aeneas, the choice will always be clear.