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## Various Manifestations of the Power of Love in Ancient Rome

*The Aeneid* by the Roman author Virgil is an epic poem that tells the tale of the Trojan prince Aeneas' journey to Italy and the eventual founding of Rome following the events of the Trojan War. This epic is often compared with two well-known predecessors, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (works commonly associated with the Greek author Homer), based on both stylistic and thematic similarities, but there are distinct differences between the two authors' works, too. As Robert Fitzgerald points out in the "Postscript" for his translation of *The Aeneid*, "[Virgil] re-created a Homeric hero in the Homeric age, he also deliberately echoed Homer in many details of narrative, in many conventions and features of style. But his purpose was totally un-Homeric and drastically original: to enfold in the mythical action of *The Aeneid* foreshadowings and direct foretellings of Roman history, more than a thousand years of it between Aeneas and his own time." It is through this "un-Homeric" narrative that Virgil is able to weave the theme of love into this tale, thus displaying his uniqueness as an author.

Love takes on many forms, ranging from romantic love to platonic, familial love and even bloodlust, which can be interpreted as the love of war and battle, one of the most violent forms of passion. With these variations of love present within *The Aeneid*, Virgil then shows how this literary theme impacts the duality of mankind as both a yielding and unyielding force, simultaneously bringing power and also exposing weakness, and consequently affecting the themes of fate and grief expressed in this poem. By presenting both the sentimental and volatile forms of love, a discernable comparison and juxtaposition between love and war is therefore made, inviting readers to determine whether love is mere emotion or a mightier force than meets the eye. Instances in which the aforementioned forms of love take place include Aeneas' relationships with his father Anchises, his son Ascanius, the Phoenician queen Dido, and the Rutulian prince Turnus, as well as the tragic tale of the Trojan lovers Nisus and Euryalus.

Firstly, Aeneas' relationships with his father Anchises and son Ascanius are portrayed as a cyclical process, in which the roles of the doting son and wise father are passed on from one generation to the next. Following Anchises' death and despite his sorrow, Aeneas maintained a respectful attitude towards his father and made an effort to honor him on the anniversary of his death, thus fulfilling his *pietas*—his duty—as Anchises' son. He says this whilst carrying out and celebrating Anchises' funeral rites and in turn demonstrates how love is steadfast, how it does not yield to death, and how it persists in spite of grief (*The Aeneid* 5.105-110):

"I greet and bless you, sacred father, bless you,  
Ashes and shade and soul, paternal soul

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I vainly rescued once. It was not given me  
With you beside me to explore the coasts  
And plains of Italy, nor to discover,  
Whatever it may be, Ausonian Tiber ... ”

Conversely, when educating his son Ascanius, Aeneas' identity takes on a notable shift, allowing him to become the very same protective patriarchal figure as Anchises had been to him. In addition to acknowledging the importance of his role in Ascanius' life, Aeneas also mentions Hector, the fallen leader of the Trojan army, who was a major character in Homer's *Iliad*. In the following excerpt from *The Aeneid* 12.595-602, Aeneas reminds Ascanius of the hardships that lie ahead of him, and the two men who will be able to teach and protect him: Aeneas and Hector. This message of passing on knowledge and the continual practice of filial piety throughout the generations hence denotes how love carries on and will continue to be passed on through such familial relationships:

“Learn fortitude and toil from me, my son,  
Ache of true toil. Good fortune learn from others.  
My sword arm now will be your shield in battle  
And introduce you to the boons of war.  
When, before long, you come to man's estate,  
Be sure that you recall this. Harking back  
For models in your family, let your father,  
Aeneas, and uncle, Hector, stir your heart.”

Yet, on the other hand, Virgil's depictions of romantic love bring forth a far different meaning to the power of love. Beginning with the ill-fated love between Aeneas and the Carthaginian queen Dido, Virgil describes what is usually rife with amorous displays and sweet courtships as something akin to a fire, a deadly passion that eats away at the vulnerable Dido from the inside. This is all thanks to the cunning workings of Venus, Aeneas' mother and the goddess of love, and her son Amor in attempts to intervene in Aeneas' chances of reaching Italy: “The inward fire eats the soft marrow away, / And the internal wound bleeds on in silence.” (*The Aeneid* 4.93-94). Following this, upon receiving the news that Aeneas is to leave Carthage to fulfill his destiny, Dido's metaphorical wound manifests itself into a tangible form through her suicide by Aeneas' blade. This ultimate act of personal sacrifice therefore shows how love yields to fate based on such extreme circumstances, and how a love so fiercely passionate could only lead to destruction (*The Aeneid* 4.904-906, 915-919):

“ ‘Remnants dear to me  
While god and fate allowed it, take this breath  
And give me respite from these agonies. [...] I die unavenged,’ she said, ‘but let me die  
This way, this way, a blessed relief to go

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Into the undergloom. Let the cold Trojan,  
Far at sea, drink in this conflagration  
And take with him the omen of my death! ”

Similarly, the tragic tale of the lovers Nisus and Euryalus also paint a less flattering picture of what romantic love can entail. After their escape from raiding the Rutulian camp goes awry and Euryalus' life is threatened, even a brave and skilled warrior such as Nisus is reduced to making terrified pleas in order to keep Euryalus from certain death. These efforts, however, proved in vain, as the lovers' captors decided to brutally murder them instead, carrying their severed heads on their spears like twisted scepters of victory back to the Rutulians' camping grounds: "The attackers' heads, indeed—a ghastly sight— / They fixed on spears, and lifted, and bore out / In taunting parade: Euryalus and Nisus" (*The Aeneid* 9.660-662). As this quote has and the following quote from 9.605-610 of *The Aeneid* will show, love has the power to reduce us to our weakest, most pathetic states in the most desperate and perilous of circumstances, especially when met with fear and grief at the same time:

"No, me! Me! Here I am! I did it! Take  
Your swords to me, Rutulians. All the trickery  
Was mine. He had not dared to do anything,  
He could not. Heaven's my witness, and the stars  
That look down on us, all he did was care  
Too much for a luckless friend."

Lastly, from a more unconventional approach, comes love in the form of bloodlust and a yearning for war and brutality. In the last few moments of *The Aeneid*, Aeneas is on the precipice of victory when Turnus pleads for mercy for his father's sake. For a brief moment, it seems as though Aeneas' bloodlust has been satiated and that his next move would be one of mercy, which would most certainly have added in another type of love into the mix—one of compassion and forgiveness. Unfortunately for Turnus, Aeneas catches sight of Pallas' swordbelt slung around the Rutulian prince's shoulders and his thirst for vengeance thus resurfaces, strengthening Aeneas' resolve to sentence Turnus to death instead. As Aeneas' final words will convey, love—at its innermost core—is still based upon human emotion and therefore has the ability to blind us to reason, rendering us, in some ways, uncaring and unfeeling towards logic and rationality, and such is the effect of bloodlust upon Aeneas (*The Aeneid* 12.1291-1294):

"You in your plunder, torn from one of mine,  
Shall I be robbed of you? This wound will come  
From Pallas: Pallas makes this offering  
And from your criminal blood exacts his due."

In conclusion, although Virgil's *Aeneid* may seem similar to the Homeric works that preceded

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this epic poem, it actually bears more differences than commonalities based on Virgil's stylistic and thematic choices. As a result, *The Aeneid* presents itself as a remarkable tale in which the sheer force of love and its variations leave discernible effects upon Virgil's characters and upon the themes of fate and grief as well. This can be seen from the presence of the deep paternal bonds between Aeneas and his father Anchises, and Aeneas and his son Ascanius, the smoldering flames of romantic love between Aeneas and the Phoenician queen Dido, as well as the tragedy of the lovers Nisus and Euryalus, and the thirst for vengeance and bloodshed between Aeneas and Rutulian prince Turnus. In turn, these three forms of love exemplify three highly different outcomes stemming from love: an unending legacy of patriarchal piety, destruction wrought by the passions and vulnerabilities love incites, and blindness and ignorance towards the rational mind. Thus, through usage of *The Aeneid's* characters and the individual struggles they face, Virgil successfully illustrates the rich thematic qualities of love as a catalyst for further action—whether that be inspiration, destruction, or otherwise—and how even the strongest, most resilient of characters are incapable of escaping its grasp.

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