



AP Latin: Vergil 1999 Sample Student Responses

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I'm unsure as to whether the conclusion of the Aeneid is tragic or triumphant. As Aeneas kills Turnus, we know intellectually that the final obstacle to Aeneas' ascent has been defeated; Aeneas can marry Lavinia, found his new Troy, lead his people into a great and glorious future. But Virgil doesn't end by reminding us of the golden destiny which Aeneas can now fulfill - his final sentence is "*Hec dicens ferrum aduerso sub pectore condidit feruidus; ast ille solvitur fagine membra, utaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.*" - This he said and burning, he plunged the sword through the chest of his enemy; his limbs loosed with cold and with a groan, his unwilling spirit fled beneath the shadows. We can almost sympathize with Turnus here, who was killed not in the heat of battle but while he was down and defeated - a "victory" on Aeneas' part which surely didn't hold with the Roman understanding of honor. A few lines earlier, Aeneas was not going to kill Turnus - he "*volvendo oculos ad dextramque repressit*" - averted his eyes and held back his hand. But when Aeneas sees Turnus wearing the baldric of Pallas, he suddenly becomes '*accensus*' - furious, seized with '*ira terribilis*' - a terrible wrath. And in the throes of his righteous anger, he stabs Turnus. Turnus dies end of story. So, is Aeneas a murderer or an avenger? Did he emerge triumphant after so many trials - or did he ultimately become that which he fought against, like ~~Pyrrhus~~ Pyrrhus killing Polites, Achilles dragging Hector's corpse around the city walls - did Aeneas who ultimately chose vengeance over mercy, become like the Greeks he so despised, the Greeks who destroyed his homeland? After all, he is the invading force here, just as the Greeks were. Virgil never explicitly questions the morality or criminality of Aeneas' actions, but ~~it is~~ such questions are implicit in the situation. I can't honestly say that I have an answer to whether Aeneas was right or wrong, but I can

answers why Virgil ended the Aeneid on this note. Throughout the book, we've seen Aeneas given such epithets as 'pius' and 'pater' - all complimentary. We have been told, again and again, that he is a hero, given a marvelous destiny. Now he fulfills his destiny; he vanquishes his enemy, avenges the death of Pallas - but has he, by doing so, betrayed the nature of ^{leadership} ~~fatherhood~~, goodness, and piety altogether. Virgil calls into question the very nature of heroism - he makes us think about the 12 books we've just read. And furthermore, this ending embodies the series of tragedies and trials Aeneas' men have faced for so many years - to simply end on a note of "happily ever after" would not fit with the often sorrowful nature of the Aeneid.

In this final scene of the Aeneid, Aeneas, the hero, is shown as a fierce man avenging the death of his young comrade Pallas. Aeneas indeed, ~~from the beginning~~ is called specifically fierce ("acer," line 1.) and this is proven when he kills Turnus. However, Aeneas is not savage, nor ~~blindly~~ does he kill Turnus blindly, just because Turnus is the enemy. After Turnus has asked Aeneas to spare his life, Aeneas pauses and briefly holds back (*dextramque repressit*, line 2) considering his actions and whether he should kill Turnus. This shows Aeneas as a thinking soldier. However, ~~though he has~~ as he hesitates, Aeneas catches sight of Pallas' swordbelt, worn by Turnus after Turnus conquered Pallas. This incites in Aeneas a terrible fury ("*furris terribilis*") (line 9-10) which drives him into action and he kills Turnus. This fury of Aeneas' ~~contrast~~ ~~with~~ shows him as ~~a real~~ ^{an} ~~more~~ emotional man, a trait of Aeneas' not unexpressed throughout the Aeneid. Aeneas kills Turnus, ~~with the words~~ ~~it~~ saying that he is acting on behalf of Pallas. This shows ~~Pallas as a~~ Aeneas as a vengeful man, dedicated to his comrades. This dedication manifests itself in the trait of Aeneas' *pietas*. Here he is depicted as a passionate man driven to action by intense emotion springing from his ~~dedication and to~~ love and respect for comrades and country.

In the final scene of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is portrayed first as at first hesitant and relenting, but then cruel and enraged.

Turnus pleads to Aeneas to spare him and Aeneas is understanding at first. He "rolls his eyes and represses his right hand" ~~conside~~ (*volvens oculos dextramque repressit*, line 2) considering whether to spare Turnus. Aeneas even "began to change his mind while hesitating" (*cunctantem... cooperat*, line 3-4). This shows how humane he is, but then this all changes. Aeneas sees the "hostile signal on (Turnus) shoulder" (*umeris inimicum insigne*) and becomes enraged. This reminder that Turnus killed Pallas and rejoiced in his spoils disturbed him and he becomes ~~hearted~~ "cold" (*fervidus*) (hearted) as he "plunges the sword ~~into~~^{below} the faene heart" of Turnus (*ca ferrum... condit* line 13). Moreover, Aeneas uses anaphora and repeats "Pallas" in his short speech to Turnus showing both Aeneas' anger and rage and also that he must kill Turnus to "crush the proud" as his father instructed in the underworld.