

## English Literature: Sample Paper

### Introduction

“*The Aeneid: A History that Hangs in the Balance of Time*” is a paper I wrote for Professor R. Thomas Simone’s English 027, a course offered in the Integrated Humanities Program (IHP) at UVM. In the fall semester, IHP courses center on the study of texts from Antiquity in the disciplines of English, Religion, and History. In the spring semester, IHP courses center on texts from Modernity in the same aforementioned disciplines. English 027 is a fall course in which students read texts such as *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *The Oresteia*, and *Inferno*. This paper is an English paper on *The Aeneid*, and the prompt for it was to simply describe how one can understand *The Aeneid* as an historical epic. This is a very traditional English paper in that it is thesis-based and has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Moreover, it discusses a text from Antiquity, so it deals with classic themes such as history, time, Greco-Roman culture, and the genre of the epic.

Note: Significant portions of the essay have been omitted in an effort to prevent plagiarism. Moreover, many of the in-text parenthetical citations read as “XXX” for the same reason.

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13 Nov. 2012

*The Aeneid: A History that Hangs in the Balance of Time*<sup>1</sup>

History dwells in the past, yet it also persists far into the future through the present, which determines the course of the forthcoming.<sup>2</sup> The abode of history comprises itself of the remnants of the past, unraveling much of its story through the incorporeal relic of memory. These remnants leave residues in the sands of time, enabling the present itself to journey to find this proof of a past life, both utilizing and cherishing the discovery.<sup>3</sup> However, the recognition of this past often causes the transition between past and future to be one of immense trials and tribulations, as the present bears the burden of both worlds.<sup>4</sup> Aeneas, a great Trojan warrior from fallen Ilium, must be the link between the past glory of Greece and the coming greatness of the Roman Empire as he sails for new lands, destined to reclaim his past to use it as a guiding force in his present, thereby enabling him to found the future kingdom that the gods deem him destined to rule.<sup>5</sup> In Virgil's *The Aeneid*, Aeneas, the protagonist of this historical epic, serves as the intermediary who resides in the present, using the recollection of his past in Greece to establish a sound future in Italy by overcoming a tempestuous transition between the two.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Always** give your paper a title. Try to make it creative, but if you can't, at least name it **something**. Otherwise, there's no way for someone to easily cite your great ideas!

<sup>2</sup> The opening sentence of the introductory paragraph should be a broad statement, one that introduces the generalities of the subject at hand. In this case, the subject is time. This gives the reader a frame of reference for what follows.

<sup>3</sup> Here, I begin to narrow the focus of the paper, applying the subject of time to the issue the paper will address: the role of **history** in the greater framework of time.

<sup>4</sup> This statement introduces the argument I will make in the paper by problematizing the connection between history and time. (For English papers, it is important to state a problem and then make an argument that addresses it. NOTE: This does *not* mean that the argument must also be a resolution.)

<sup>5</sup> Here, I apply all the aforementioned generalities to a specific text, Virgil's *The Aeneid*.

<sup>6</sup> This is the **thesis statement**, which explicitly states the argument that will be the driving force of the essay. A good thesis should:

- Include the name of the author and title of the work
- Stake an original claim that *bases itself* upon the provided information from the text

Aeneas' quest to connect the past and the future opens in the present discord of his life, which depicts him as the perseverant navigator of the high seas, enduring the wrathful storm that Juno requests King Aeolus to unleash upon him.<sup>7</sup> This tempest is long overdue, for it is the storm that the Greeks incited when they left the Trojans "buffeted on the waste of sea" and "far from Ilium,"<sup>8</sup> stranded after the defeat that caused them to seek "their destiny . . .<sup>9</sup> from one sea to the next" (1.44, 46-48)<sup>10</sup>. Despite this horribly difficult interruption of their entire way of existence, the Trojans, "beaten as they are," brave the storm, attempting the arduous task "to found the Roman people" in Italy, their land of posterity (1.49, 96). King Aeolus awakens the squall, "[giving] the hollow mountainside a stroke," thereby challenging Aeneas and his crew to yet another fierce foe, that of the "winds in ranks" that, as though preparing "for battle," hurtles itself at the Trojans, "blowing across the earth in hurricane" (1.115-118). Waging war, the storm

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- Usually be the last one or two sentences of the first paragraph (Use a semicolon to be able to expand your argument across two sentences while still avoiding a run-on sentence.)
  - Be a "specific generalization," meaning that you mention each explicit point you will make without actually addressing each point till later in the essay

Keep in mind:

- Do NOT be afraid to tweak the thesis after you've written some or all of the body of the essay—things change!

<sup>7</sup> Transition sentence. Main idea = the present.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of quote integration. No comma needed before the quotation marks, which is the **general** rule when it comes to quote integration.

<sup>9</sup> Use an ellipsis to include only the most pertinent information and still enable the quote to flow well.

<sup>10</sup> MLA-style, in-text parenthetical citation comes at the **END** of the sentence and **BEFORE** the closing punctuation mark, which is usually a period.

When dealing with one text—especially an Ancient text whose author has no last name—one does not need to include the author's name. However, in most cases, one should include the author's name, especially for works of fiction, such as novels, short stories, and plays.

1.44, 46-48 = Book One, lines 44 and 46 through 48

For novels:

(Hemingway 17) = page 17 of a given novel by Hemingway

For plays:

Basic:

(Act 1, Scene 1, ln 2-5) = Act 1, Scene 1, lines 2-5

Advanced:

(1.1.2-5) = Act 1, Scene 1, lines 2-5 (formatted like citations for Ancient epics)

“[thunders] from all quarters,” causing Aeneas’ knees to become “numb and slack” as, in the midst of this calamity, he “[stretches] both hands to heaven” to beseech mercy from the gods (1.128, 132). This is to no avail, for a “howling gust/From due north [takes] the sail aback and [lifts]/Wavetops to heaven” as oars snap in half and “a mountain of grey water [crashes] in tons” over the flank and deck of the ship (XXX).<sup>11</sup> The violence of this storm is a physical manifestation of the challenge that Aeneas must confront in being the intermediary between past and future.<sup>12</sup> The salient clash between past and future—known and unknown, scathed and unscathed—causes the present to implode, unable to smoothly undergo the transition, much like it is difficult for the Trojans to leave their Greek past in ruins in order to build a new life in Italy.<sup>13</sup>

Aeneas is at the heart of the maelstrom, and his placement here signifies his essential centrality in the act of not only remembering but also *revering* the past, a notion that enables the Trojans to boldly enter the future without losing themselves or their heritage in the process. . . .

Despite this positive development in the calming of the present, Aeneas’ predicament remains unresolved. Juno still reigns victorious in her desire to hinder the Trojans’ travels; Aeneas and his crew must “[turn] their prows toward Libya” to seek refuge instead of continuing toward Italy (XXX). . . . No longer blazing a direct course to Italy and his future kingdom, Aeneas must consult his past to determine how to most effectively navigate towards a promising future for his people.

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<sup>11</sup> Quote integration is particularly useful because it is brief and allows you to elaborate while still in the states of citing evidence to build your argument. It lets you, as the writer, get a word in edgewise, making sure that the text itself does not speak above you.

<sup>12</sup> Elaboration after all evidence has been presented.

<sup>13</sup> Transition sentence. Here, the concluding sentence of this paragraph makes the shift between the present in general and how it will apply to the Trojans, with Aeneas acting as a symbol of the present.

After enduring the tempest that is the present, Aeneas uses the remnants of his past to reveal the ideal future. <sup>14</sup>Upon reaching Carthage, Aeneas encounters the first remnant of his past: a mural of Troy and its toils during the Trojan War. As he awaits Queen Dido in the great temple, he “[finds] before his eyes the Trojan battles/In the old war,” which is “now known throughout the world” as a remarkably violent, seemingly endless struggle (XXX). This recognition of the past causes Aeneas to “[halt],” mourning his old life; tears well in his pained eyes, whose doleful glint reflect a strife that his internal vision magnifies, prompting the wet sheen of suffering to coat his lashes with the wavering hope that the mural instills in him <sup>15</sup>(XXX). Aeneas “[feasts] his eyes” on the mural for a prolonged moment, “seeing again how, fighting around Troy,” the Greeks stormed the walls of Ilium (XXX). This “mere image” is, in Aeneas’ eyes, not only a great sadness but a harsh reality; while others merely see this history, Aeneas *relives* the final Greek attack on the Trojans, an attack that utterly obliterates the heart of this people, leaving said heart trampled amidst the fading din of fury as the Trojans’ crimson blood spills across a land that war renders inhospitable (XXX). . . .

. . . Ascanius, Aeneas’ son, trails behind Aeneas and Anchises; his shadowing of his elders evokes the image of unity among the generations, depicting the historical intimacy of the various epochs that comprise time itself. Their fleeing from Troy exhibits the three stages—past, present, and future—of the historical epic through the connection among three distinct generations; Aeneas, the present, carries Anchises, the past, towards safety so that Ascanius, the future, has a chance to someday spring forth from the wreckage with some aspects of his heritage

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<sup>14</sup> Transition sentence. This marks a notable shift in the three larger parts of the essay, moving from discussion of the present, which straddles the past and future, to a discussion of the past. This transition sentence reminds the reader of the overarching points that the thesis states the essay will cover.

<sup>15</sup> To all you creative writers out there: Don’t be afraid to be bold with your diction and figurative techniques, even in an academic essay! Sometimes, it makes your points much more memorable.

salvaged, enabling him to represent the future while bearing the residues of his sage cultural past.<sup>16</sup> All of history dwells in this triad of generational unity, intimately intermingling for one common purpose: human survival and the eternal persistence of existence throughout history. . . .

With his newfound knowledge of the significance of the past, Aeneas prepares himself to confront his near future in order to establish the lasting future of his people in Italy. Aeneas, now definitively en route to Italy, begins to fulfill the prophesy of the gods, who promise him all the power and glory of founding a new civilization.<sup>17</sup> Jupiter is the first to allude to the coming greatness of Aeneas, whose future comprises “[fighting] a massive war” from which he emerges as the victor and “[establishes] city walls and a way of life” for his people (XXX). . . . Amidst all this, the people tend to governmental tasks, such as enacting laws and choosing “magistrates and a sacred senate” (XXX). Inspired, Aeneas marvels at “how fortunate these are/Whose city walls are rising here and now” (XXX). Aeneas must use his experiences in Carthage—those from his present—to bridge the gap between past and future, incorporating the old into the new through present means and modeling. Should he accomplish this in Italy, his future is a promising and lasting one.

As an historical epic, Virgil’s *The Aeneid* recounts the struggle of one man, Aeneas, to rebuild a nation and inspire a people to go beyond its borders in search of a future that enables them to begin anew on virgin soil.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, Aeneas calls upon the past to guide him in his journey, entering into an initially tumultuous present that leads him to an auspicious future.

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<sup>16</sup> Since the essay is now approaching its conclusion, I made sure to have the elaboration start directly relating back to the thesis; this way, the reader stays “on track” for the entirety of the essay.

<sup>17</sup> Again, this is a major transition sentence, and it marks the shift from the discussion of the past to that of the present.

<sup>18</sup> Restatement of thesis with a more conclusive ending. This enables the reader to recall your argument and decide if you’ve amply proved your point. Think of the concluding paragraph as an inversion of the introductory paragraph: Introduction = general to specific

Conclusion = specific to general

Aeneas' journey through history realizes itself through Aeneas' culture, family, misfortune, and sorrow, ultimately culling from each of these elements the necessary components for a successful future. As Aeneas learns, despite the perils of the past, there is always hope in the future; it is man's role in the present that truly determines what the future holds in its outstretched arms, awaiting not only the history that conceives it, but he who is the sole bearer of history through all time: man.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Concluding sentence. This sentence should really leave the reader feeling satisfied, bringing all of the prior information together for one final, culminating thought that just says it all!