

While the proem of the *Iliad* tells us emphatically that “the will of Zeus was coming to fulfillment” (*Il.* 1.5), the king of the gods in the *Aeneid* is conspicuously upstaged by the queen (*Aen.* 1.9). Yet Jupiter’s pronouncements on the fate of Aeneas’ people, especially in his prophecies to Venus in Book 1 and to Juno in Book 12, have the ring of definitive authority, transcending Juno’s *furor* and imposing “Cosmos and Imperium” on the world (Hardie 1986). Modern interpretations of the poem have called into question whether the cosmic order represented by Jupiter has in fact, by the poem’s end, vanquished the chaos represented by Juno (Putnam 1965, Dyson 2001); these readings tend to focus on the goddess herself and on Aeneas, whose furious pain as he sacrifices Turnus resembles in some ways that of Juno’s at the poem’s beginning. This paper seeks to shed light on our encounters with Jupiter himself, both direct, as an actor in the narrative, and indirect, in secondary or partially concealed references by the narrator and by other characters.

The paper’s primary strategy is one of defamiliarization: that is, to lay aside the assumption that Jupiter represents benign paternal authority and instead to approach the text as if we were meeting the god for the first time. Some interesting results follow. For instance, in Book 1, we see a god who allows his daughter to appropriate his thunderbolt (42); who sleeps with his sister (47); who “dreads” the dissolution of the universe (61); who lets his wife talk him into surrendering control of the winds to a petty god (65, 78); and who, when we first meet him in person, is “tossing cares in his heart” (*iactantem pectore curas*, 1.227). In Book 2, Jupiter’s revealed role in the destruction of Troy (617) clashes so disconcertingly with Anchises’ faithful prayer (689) that one modern scholar attributes to Virgil an end-of-life conversion experience prompting the wish to destroy his own poem (Austin [1964] xxi). Jupiter is elsewhere associated, sometimes in passing, with the forces of darkness and destruction, as when he hides the sky in shadow (6.272), urges Mezentius to do battle (10.689), or, most famously, sends a hellish Dira (12.849-54) to harry Turnus. There is more than playful marital/fraternal repartee in his final statement to Juno that the two of them are alike in their “floods of wrath” (12.831) and that he “willingly submits to defeat” by her (12.833). Nevertheless, his face has the power to “calm the sky and storms” (1.255) as he delivers to Venus his reassuring prophecy about the fate of Rome; in a departure from Hesiodic tradition, his thunderbolt represents the forces of order against the monstrous Aegaeon (10.567); and his stirring proclamation of Roman *pietas* (12.839) appears to resolve the poem’s central conflict.

The characterization of the chief god as “all-powerful” but plagued by care and fear, as the ruler of heaven but with ties to the forces of hell, contributes to the perplexing, seductive power of Virgil’s reflections on the mystery of human destiny.