

**VIRGIL – THE AENIED – ‘Storm & Banquet’**  
**The Significance of Immortals and Fate**

In Virgil’s *‘The Aeneid’*, the intertwining themes of immortals and fate play a key role within the storyline, examples of which can be found in the events of *‘Storm and Banquet’*. It is these two themes that establish the foundation of the poem, as well as acting as the key elements that drive the events of the storyline.

At the time of Virgil, fate was considered a sacred philosophy that affected everyone. It was the belief that events in one’s life were designed and predestined to occur. Whether that fate was destined to be one of glory or downfall, it would be unavoidable at all costs. Part of this sacred belief was that fate was controlled at will by Jupiter, the leading superior Olympian who had the power to map out the fate of an individual mortal. Using his immortal powers and the assistance of other gods and messengers, he would ensure that that particular fate was fulfilled. Other less significant gods and goddesses would attempt to intervene with his plans for their own personal achievement, but Jupiter’s decisions are always final, making fate inescapable.

In the case of *‘The Aeneid’*, the central focus of the poem is the destined journey of Aeneas to establish a new home in Italy, allowing his descendants Romulus and Remus to found Rome. Jupiter takes control of this fate and assures Venus, Aeneas’ mother, that this outcome cannot be changed, even by the destructive anger and grudge of Juno— *‘The destiny of your descendants remains unchanged...you will take great-hearted Aeneas up to the stars of heaven’*. Venus also intervenes with the fate of her son, driving it forwards and using Dido as a pawn. Because Juno has Aeolus assist in her act of revenge against the Trojans, it is necessary for Jupiter to take the side of Venus, an act that sets the storyline in motion. This shows the importance of the immortals and their dealings with fate to be vital.

A good example of an immortals’ intervention into the storyline comes at the very start of *‘Storm and Banquet’*, through the *‘fierce and unforgotten anger’* of Juno. Angered by the events of the Trojan war and through fear of a prophesised Trojan attack on her favoured island Carthage, Juno’s grudge leads her to confront Aeolus, god of wind, to release a tempest that will destroy the Trojan fleet, bringing out panic and despair within Aeneas— *‘Wherever the Trojans looked, death stared them in the face’*. As well as providing an effective opening to the poem, Juno’s anger is significant to the idea that fate is unavoidable. Her plans to prevent the prophesised events are blocked by Neptune, who calms the storm, allowing the surviving Trojan ships to sail to safety. Neptune’s intervention is vital in showing that Juno’s destructive anger cannot damage the design of Aeneas’ fate.

Juno’s anger is possibly symbolic of the mythological idea that immortals are very similar in their character to normal humans. They express anger, jealous and bitterness towards others and each other. Although her actions are not entirely human, Juno’s lust for revenge shows that even immortals are affected by emotions, much like mortals.

Both Neptune and Aeolus demonstrate the power to control nature; another key element of the poem. Virgil was inspired by Homer in a number of ways, and it is possible that this mythological element is one of them. Such incidences also allow him to display his use of imagery; for example his description of Aeolus releasing the tempest is extremely vivid— *‘The winds seemed to form a column and pour out through an open gate to blow a hurricane over the whole world’*. When Neptune blocks Juno’s intentions and calms the storm, Virgil shows the god’s powerful influence over nature in his speech to the winds— *‘Do you winds now dare to move heaven and earth and raise these great masses of water without my divine authority?’*. This also implies that the winds have will of their own, and are inferior to the extent that they must obey the demands of such a powerful immortal. In a way this supports the mythological ideas that nature is controlled by the immortals, and that nature itself acts as their means of expressing emotion and enforcing their authority.

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It is likely that the immortals were used as a way of promoting pride in Rome. When Virgil died with the poem incomplete, Augustus had it completed not long after as he liked it so much. It is possible that he used the poem as propaganda to promote Rome as a city favoured by the gods. The description of Neptune calming the sea compares the god to a statesman silencing a rioting city with his words, possibly a way of comparing Augustus himself to a mighty god with the power to silence an entire city - *'a man who has some weight among [a city] for his goodness and his services to the state'*.

The goddess of love and beauty, Venus is significant to the themes of immortals and fate. As the mother of Aeneas, she acts in defence of him out of fear of Juno's intentions. Upon seeing the storm, she expresses her anxiety to Jupiter - *'What great harm has my son Aeneas been able to do to you?'* In comparison Juno who shows herself to be human-like due to her emotions, Venus shows the human-like quality of motherly love for her son and concern for his life (a further example of Virgil adapting Homer's mythological ideas). It is this distress that leads her actions later. When Aeneas lands on Libya, Venus takes on the form of a Spartan girl to lead him to Dido. This ability to take on a disguise is another mythological influence that demonstrates the power of immortals. But like other similar cases, the disguise is never accurate enough to remain foolproof as Aeneas instantly recognises her immortal qualities - *'Your face is not the face of a mortal, and you do not speak like a human being. Surely you must be a goddess'*.

During this confrontation, Aeneas' self-pity brings out the human-like quality of Venus' motherly concern - *'[She] could listen to no more. She broke in on the tale of his sufferings'*. Virgil shows the pair to have some form of mother-son relationship similar to that of Achilles and Thetis from *'The Iliad'*. This is shown through Aeneas' words the moment that Venus turns away and her immortal beauty is revealed - *'Why am I never allowed to take your hand in mine, to hear your true voice and speak to you as you really are?'*.

Venus makes one final intervention into the storyline at the end of *'Storm and Banquet'*. In an attempt to save her son from Juno's manipulation that may stir the people of Carthage to turn against Aeneas, she sends Cupid to Dido in the form of Aeneas' son Ascanius. Being the god of sexual passion, Cupid places with the queen an infatuation for Aeneas that will save him from being attacked by Juno. However, it is this passion that will lead to Dido's own downfall.

In conclusion, I feel that the intertwining theme of immortals and fate are the key elements of the *'The Aeneid'*. Fate is controlled by the will of the gods and is unavoidable, there fore it is these two important factors that drive the storyline, events having been planned out beforehand. The actions of the immortals also help us to understand the philosophies and beliefs of the people at the time and how they possibly viewed the natural world, as well as the mythological influences from Homer that helped to inspire Virgil.