

Virgil's Swallow: A Note from Plutarch's *Table-Talk*

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Plutarch's *Moralia* is a vast and variegated collection of prose works, displaying an astonishing range of learning and preserving a wealth of arcane lore; the title is a convenient (if inexact) label for the surviving genuine and pseudo-epigraphic works of the author apart from the *Vitae Parallelae*.

The nine books of the *Symposiaca* (the so-called *Quaestiones Convivales* or *Table-Talk*) constitute one of the more encyclopedic and miscellaneous elements of the collection.¹ The subjects for scholarly debate range widely in the physical and natural sciences, in religion and cult practices, and in both more hackneyed and more abstruse philosophical problems.

The seventh question of the eighth book is devoted to certain Pythagorean practices and prohibitions, including the injunction against allowing swallows in one's residence (*καὶ χελιδόνας οἰκία μὴ δέχεσθαι* (*Quaes. Conv.* 727c). To some of the interlocutors, it seemed odd to have such a rule about an inoffensive and indeed kindly bird (*μάλιστα τὸ τῶν χελιδόνων ἀτοπίαν ἔχειν ἔδόκει, ζῶον ἀσινὲς καὶ φιλόανθρωπον εἶργεσθαι* (727c)). Hence the question arose of the rationale for the ban.

The commonplace explanation offered (without citation) is that the swallow emits a whisper-like sound that is reminiscent of the hushed voices of slanderers (*ὥς πρὸς τοὺς διαβόλους καὶ ψιθύρους τῶν συνήθων ἡνιγμένον* (727d)); this theory is dismissed on the grounds that swallows do not in fact make such a noise, and that they are no more garrulous than many other birds (*ψιθυρισμοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἤκιστα χελιδόνι μέτεστι, λαλιάς δὲ καὶ πολυφωνίας οὐ μᾶλλον ἢ κίτταις καὶ πέρδιξι καὶ ἀλεκτορίσιν* (727d)). The rejection is thus rooted in science, not in mythology or folklore.

¹ For the text see Hubert 1971. Book IX of the *Symposiaca* was edited by F.H. Sandbach (with an English translation and brief notes) for the ninth volume of the Loeb Classical Library set of the *Moralia* (= Minar, Sandbach, and Helmbold 1961).

The notorious story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela is likewise considered and rejected as a possible explanation for wariness about the bird, in a passage of greater length:

“ἄρ’ οὖν” ὁ Σύλλας ἔφη “διὰ τὸν μῦθον τὸν περὶ τὴν παιδοφορίαν ἀφοσιοῦνται τὰς χελιδόνας, ἅπωθεν ἡμᾶς πρὸς ἐκεῖνα τὰ πάθη διαβάλλοντες, ἐξ ὧν τὸν Τηρέα καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας τὰ μὲν δρᾶσαι τὰ δὲ παθεῖν ἄθροισμα καὶ σχέτλια λέγουσι, καὶ μέχρι νῦν Δαυλίδας ὀνομάζουσιν τὰς ὄρνιθας, Γοργίας δ’ ὁ σοφιστής, χελιδόνος ἀφείσης ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀπόπατον, ἀναβλέψας πρὸς αὐτὴν ‘οὐ καλὰ ταῦτ’ ἔειπεν ‘ὦ Φιλομήλα’²; ἢ καὶ τοῦτο κενὸν ἐστὶ; τὴν γὰρ ἀηδόνα, ταῖς αὐταῖς τραγωδίαις ἔνοχον οὖσαν, οὐκ ἀπείργουσιν οὐδὲ ξηνηλατοῦσιν.” (727d-e)

This is a classic instance of Plutarchean analysis, alluding to well-known lore from mythology that might be supposed to provide an exegesis of a strange custom, only for him to dismiss poetic fancy in favor of a more rationalistic solution.³

Plutarch notes that the swallow is a flesh-eater, with a particular fondness for feasting on musical cicadas, a sacred insect (*σαρκοφάγος γάρ ἐστιν καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς τέττιγας, ἱερὸν καὶ μουσικὸν ὄντα, ἀποκτίννυσιν καὶ σιτεῖται* (727e)).⁴ Citing Aristotle, Plutarch points out that she is a low-flying bird, a hunter of tiny prey (*καὶ πρόσγειος αὐτῆς ἡ πτησίς ἐστι, τὰ μικρὰ καὶ λεπτὰ τῶν ζώων ἀρρευνούσης, ὥς φησιν Ἀριστοτέλης* (727e)).⁵ And uniquely among the creatures with whom human beings share their lodgings, the swallow contributes nothing whatsoever to the household (*ἔπειτα μόνῃ τῶν ὁμωροφίων ἀσύμβολος ἐνοικεῖ καὶ ἀτελὴς ἐνδιατᾶται* (727f)). She raises her young, and then she is gone; her characteristics are ingratitude and suspicion, notwithstanding all the benefits that she enjoys from being a boarder (*ἢ δὲ πάντων τυχοῦσα τούτων, ὅταν ἐκθρέψῃ καὶ τελειώσῃ τοὺς νεοσσούς, ἅπεισιν ἀχάριστος γενομένη καὶ ἄπιστος* (727f-728a)).

Worst of all, Plutarch adds, the swallow – like the fly – cannot be tamed. She is profoundly misanthropic and devoid of trust:

ὁ δὲ δεινότατόν ἐστι, μόνῃ τῶν συνοίκων μυῖα καὶ χελιδὼν οὐχ ἡμεροῦται πρὸς ἄνθρωπον οὐδ’ ἀνέχεται ψαῦσιν οὐδ’ ὁμίλιαν οὐδὲ κοινωνίαν ἔργου τινὸς ἢ παιδιᾶς, ἢ μὲν μυῖα φοβούμενῃ τῷ πάσχειν κακῶς καὶ διασοβεῖσθαι πολλάκις,

² Cf. *De sollertia animalium* 962f, where the swallow is cited for its exceptional cleanliness.

³ Cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.20.

⁴ Cf. *De sollertia animalium* 976d and Aelian, *De natura animalium* 8.6.

⁵ The reference to Aristotle = fr. 353 Rose.

⁶ Turnebus’ humanist conjecture is superior to the paradosis *ἄπιστος*, though the choice of reading does not affect the arguments made herein.

ἡ δὲ χελιδὼν τῷ φύσει μισάνθρωπος εἶναι καὶ δι' ἀπιστίαν ἀτιθάσεντος ἀεὶ καὶ ὕποπτος. (728a)

It is an interesting juxtaposition of prey and predator; both fly and swallow are freeloaders. But the swallow is worse. Simply put, in Plutarch's estimation, for the Pythagoreans the swallow is a veritable paradigm of inconstancy and lack of appreciation for its benefactors (*παράδειγμα τὰς χελιδόνας τοῦ ἀβεβαίου καὶ ἀχαρίστου* (728a)).

Among the problems discussed in the *Symposiaca*, this swallow reflection may seem to be a less than riveting digression, of greatest interest for its information on practices associated with Pythagorean beliefs or local folklore, a text to be compared with similar zoological passages from Aristotle or Aelian. But Plutarch's ornithological lore may prove to be of use in more fully understanding certain aspects of the poet Virgil's allusion to the bird in a key passage from his epic *Aeneid*. A close study of a celebrated Virgilian simile in light of what we learn from Plutarch will reveal a rich array of purposeful details and meaningful employment of imagery that is no mere artistic embellishment of the narrative. Rather, Virgil's depiction of the swallow will be shown to reflect exactly what Plutarch expounds upon in his *Table-Talk*.⁷

In Book 12 of the *Aeneid*, the swallow makes its sole appearance in Virgil's epic.⁸ Juturna is worried for the safety of her brother, the Rutulian hero Turnus. She seeks to keep him away from Aeneas on the battlefield, taking the dramatic step of directly involving herself in the fray by assuming control of Turnus' chariot by taking on the appearance of its driver Metiscus, whom she unceremoniously ejects (12.468-72).⁹ Virgil describes the subsequent actions of Juturna by means of a memorable image, an avian simile that compares the audacious nymph to a black swallow:

nigra uelut magnas domini cum diuitis aedes
peruolat et pennis alta atria lustrat hirundo,
pabula parua legens nidisque loquacibus escas,
et nunc poticibus uacuis, nunc humida circum

⁷ We cannot be sure that Plutarch had Virgil in mind when he composed this passage. Nor can we be certain as to the full extent of his source material for his information on swallows. What is taken to be a reasonable assumption for purposes of this study is that the lore that Plutarch records was available in sources accessible by Virgil (e.g., Aristotle, the one author mentioned in the text). The argument hinges on the idea that such knowledge about the habits of swallows enriches our appreciation of Virgil.

⁸ On passages from *Aeneid* 12 note especially Tilly 1969, Tarrant 2012, and Traina 2017, *ad loc.* On Juturna see further Fratanuono 2011.

⁹ For the onomastic evocation of both *metus* and *μήτις* see Paschalis 1997, p. 435. The semantic allusions accord with the context: Juturna is both fearful and prudent.

her son in revenge ... The stain of her crime persists on the bird's plumage ... Ovid's account concludes with similar detail (he treats both sisters) ... At *E.* 6.78-81 V. refers to the tale, but mentions only Philomela, as here he mentions only Procne. At some point in the tradition the two became interchangeable."¹³

Virgil's black swallow in Book 12 of the *Aeneid* is almost certainly the *Hirundo rustica*, the "common" or "barn" swallow.¹⁴ This is by far the most common European swallow. Often the upperparts of the bird are indeed a very dark blue that approaches black or at least blackish. The throat is usually rufous, not exactly red but close enough for the poet's purposes (chestnut, to be more precise).¹⁵ The colors, however, do exhibit some variation, and Virgil's use of *nigra* is perfectly correct, and indeed some swallows are more distinctively red or reddish than others, such that the reference to a telltale vestige of the bloody hands of the sisters is by no means absurd or worthy of charges of ornithological imprecision. In other words, the swallows of the *Georgics* and of the *Aeneid* may be taken to be of the same species.

Virgil's swallow simile has been the subject of some scholarly attention, though the precise contextual significance of all the details has not been satisfactorily explicated.¹⁶ One important study has focused on what exactly the bird's food is imagined to be,¹⁷ in response to the criticisms of the passage leveled against it by other scholars on dubious grounds.¹⁸ Rhonda Beare persuasively argues against those who would imagine that the bird is snatching morsels and crumbs of food from the table as if she were a Harpy (a common mistranslation, as she notes, in renderings of the passage).

One noteworthy feature of the simile is the seeming disconnect between what Juturna is ostensibly trying to do, and the action of the bird of the simile. The swallow is hunting for food for its noisy nestlings. It is seeking insects, mainly flies, bees, or wasps.¹⁹ Juturna's principal goal is to keep her brother away from Aeneas. But in the meantime, Turnus is not exactly lazy or inactive:

¹³ Thomas 1988, p. 150. At *Fasti* 2.853-6 Ovid specifically associates Procne with the swallow.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive study of this bird see Turner 2006.

¹⁵ "Distinctive rufous-chestnut on forehead and often on throat; blue upperparts and pale underparts." (Turner and Rose 1989, p. 62).

¹⁶ J.S. [sic] 1919 is devoted to the specific taxonomy of the bird.

¹⁷ Beare 2000.

¹⁸ Cf. Hough 1974 (where it is argued that the Juturna-bird is a martin, not a swallow). Beare correctly concludes that Virgil's bird is the common swallow, and that Hough's chromatic objection is "mistaken"; for her, the decisive point in favor of the swallow and not the martin (which can also be *nigra*, and which is also a predator of insects) is Virgil's description of the bird's flight, which is peculiarly swallow-like.

¹⁹ In Plutarch the cicada is cited as a particular favorite on the swallow's menu. For the cicada in Virgil cf. *E.* 2.13, 5.77, and *G.* 3.328.

... similis medios Iuturna per hostis
 fertur equis rapidoque uolans obit omnia curru,
 iamque hic germanum iamque hic ostentat ovantem
 nec conferre manum patitur, uolat auia longe. (12.477-80)

Turnus is *ovans* precisely because he is striking down his enemies; what the disguised Iuturna does not allow is for him to come to close quarters (namely or at least especially with Aeneas). Her action directly relates to Aeneas' single-minded pursuit of his antagonist:

ipse neque auersos dignatur sternere morti
 nec pede congressos aequo nec tela ferentis
 insequitur: solum densa in caligine Turnum
 uestigat lustrans, solum in certamina poscit. (12.464-7)

Aeneas ignores the routed Rutulians as they flee; his focus is on Turnus alone.

The hapless prey of Turnus' *ovatio* are the Trojans and their allies who happen to be in the path of the chariot. They are mowed down as Iuturna-Metiscus zigzags across the battlefield. Iuturna corresponds to the swallow, Turnus to her twittering nestlings, and the enemy warriors to the *pabula parva* she seeks for them. "Feeding Turnus" in this case means satisfying his own quest for glory and battlefield renown. He is not willingly or willfully running away from Aeneas out of fear. There are other targets, and Iuturna's method of safeguarding her brother from Aeneas is to lead him here and there in the target-rich environment.

But what of the wealthy lord and the empty porticoes of his great house? Virgil's swallow hunts her prey both there and around damp ponds. In terms of bird biology there is no problem; *Hirundo rustica* seeks her insects in both locales. We may wonder, however, if there is a correspondence in the text that renders the simile particularly fitting. Here we must recall a passage from earlier in the epic, one that describes exactly the sort of situation that would be a dream for a house or barn swallow:

laurus erat tecti medio in penetralibus altis
 sacra comam multosque metu seruata per annos,
 quam pater inuentam, primas cum conderet arces,
 ipse ferebatur Phoebo sacrasse Latinus,
 Laurentisque ab ea nomen posuisse colonis.
 huius apes summum densae (mirabile dictu)
 stridore ingenti liquidum trans aethera uectae
 obsedere apicem, et pedibus per mutua nexis
 examen subitum ramo frondente pependit.
 continuo uates "externum cernimus" inquit
 "adventare uirum et partis petere agmen easdem

partibus ex isdem et summa dominarier arce.” (7.59-70)

The scene is the lofty inner court of Latinus' palace; the bee portent is interpreted as being a harbinger of exactly the sort of migration that we see unfold in the matter of the Trojan arrival in Latium. The Trojan swarm, as it were, has alighted in the Ausonian royal house. According to the prescripts of the *Georgics*, one should avoid placing hives near the haunts of swallows. The situation here is different; no one set out to practice the apiary arts in Latinus' palace. Bees have arrived from abroad in a sudden swarm (7.67 *examen subitum*), in exactly the sort of rich house where the Juturna-swallow is said to do her hunting.²⁰ As for the empty porticoes (12.476 *porticibus uacuis*) where the bird hunts, this too is contextually fitting. Yes, the porticoes are vast in size because the owner is rich. But they have also been emptied by the costly war.

Insects are found even in the dwelling of the wealthy. Swallows hunt there, and in freshwater pools. The *humida stagna* (12.476-7) the swallow frequents accord with the realm over which the nymph Juturna presides (cf. 12.139-40 ... *stagnis quae fluminibusque sonoris / praesidet* ...). Fittingly, the goddess who is associated with pools and rivers is compared to a bird that haunts such locales in search of food.

The swallow is said to be seeking small morsels of food for her young, which readers of Virgil would recognize as a reference to insects. Interestingly, later in Book 12 we find another simile, where Aeneas is compared to a shepherd smoking out bees:

inclusas ut cum latebroso in pumice pastor
uestigauit apes fumoque impleuit amaro;
illae intus trepidae rerum per cerea castra
discurrunt magnisque acuunt stridoribus iras,
uoluitur ater odor tectis, tum murmure caeco
intus saxa sonant, uacuas it fumus ad auras. (12.587-92)

Here the bees clearly represent the Latins. The bees of the simile have not made their home in a palace hall, but in the more natural shelter provided by hollow pumice. The shepherd is Aeneas. Using smoke was a common practice of ancient beekeeping, designed to calm or sedate the bees so as to seize their honeycombs.

An apian picture thus unfolds in the second half of the *Aeneid*, with the arrival of the Trojan swarm, the question of the fate of the existing Latin one, and the ultimate relationship between the two. Smoking out bees is a practice of

²⁰ Certainly one does not want bees in one's house either, or flies. Swallows would help to solve such problems, but the Plutarch passage is focused on why ultimately the swallow is not, in fact, a useful houseguest.

apiary management, but the immediate epic context is a violent one: a frustrated Aeneas is considering a fiery attack on Latinus' city:

ferte faces propere foedusque reposcite flammis (12.573)

And Aeneas' action with the bees is a verbal echo of what he did with Turnus (cf. 12.588 **uestigauit** apes ... and both 12.466-7 ... *solum densa in caligine Turnum / uestigat lustrans, solum in certamina poscit* and 12.557 *ille ut uestigans diversa per agmina Turnum*).

We may summarize. In Book 7, the Trojan arrival in central Italy is implicitly compared to the sudden portent of a bee swarm in Latinus' palace. In the last book of the epic's second half, Aeneas is depicted as a stereotypical violent invader, with his envisaged incendiary assault compared to the action of a shepherd in smoking out bees.²¹ The water goddess Juturna is like a swallow who seeks to provide her nestlings with (Trojan) bees. She is, after all, a local goddess, and so while Turnus is her brother and not her offspring, still he and his men are in some sense under her protective wing by virtue of her immortal status and supernatural abilities.

But let us consider more details from the *Symposiaca*. The picture of the swallow that emerges from Plutarch's discussion of Pythagorean teachings about the bird is not a positive one. There is no emphasis on the bird's great skill in building nests, or its noteworthy devotion to its young. There is no consideration of its possible usefulness as an exterminator. Rather, the focus is on the swallow's ingratitude, misanthropy, and generally suspicious nature.

Here there is much that accords with Virgil's Juturna. In the end, the bold goddess is dismissed from the battlefield by the *Dira* sent by Jupiter. She submits to the inevitable and abandons the defense of her brother, though not without bitter reproaches for the sinister winged creature that serves at Jupiter's behest:

... ne me terrete timentem,
obscenae uolucres; alarum uerbera nosco
lethalemque sonum, nec fallunt iussa superba
magnanimi Iouis. haec pro uirginitate reponit? (12.875-8)

²¹ The simile is especially rich precisely because it reflects the complex realities of the war and is invested with studied ambiguities. The shepherd who uses smoke on bees wants to calm them so as to be able to raid their honey; his goal is not to slaughter them. Aeneas is fighting for Latinus' daughter Lavinia. While he is enraged and full of violent thoughts, the main focus of his rage is Pallas' killer Turnus. The idea of assaulting Latinus' city was put into his head by Venus (12.554-6) in the frustrated period in which Juturna was keeping her brother away from him. What is contemplated constitutes a capricious act of reckless violence, one that would have surely resulted in collateral damage. The simile reduces the Latins to the status of bees to be plundered for their honey by their manager and keeper.

The rueful reference here is to Jupiter's assault of Juturna (cf. *erepta uirginitate* at 12.141). Juno alludes to the same crime, in language that underscores how the jealous goddess has shown favor to Juturna, in contrast to her usual harassment of her husband's victims:

nympha, decus fluviorum, animo gratissima nostro,
scis ut te cunctis unam, quaecumque Latinae
magnanimi Iovis ingratum ascendere cubile,
praetulerim caelique libens in parte locarim (12.142-5)

There is a grim point of commonalty between Juturna and Philomela; both women were victims of sexual violence. Philomela's sister Procne was a devoted sibling, and she sought to cooperate in seeking revenge on Tereus. The loyal sister Procne was turned into a swallow (at least in some versions of the lore), and the faithful Juturna is fittingly compared to the same bird. Juturna's lot is especially lamentable, because on account of her rape she recalls both Procne and Philomela. And this recollection of both sisters serves the poet's purpose on an intertextual level as well, given that the siblings became interchangeable at some point in the tradition. Virgil's Juturna is polyvalent, recalling aspects of the grim stories of both sisters.

Virgil's Juturna is bitter, but with ample justification given her history with Jupiter and the fate of her brother. Correspondences are not exact; the poet is not composing allegory in some simplistic, crudely structured manner. Juturna has a brother, not a sister.²² In the simile, the swallow is seeking food for its clutch; in the narrative, a sister is seeking to save her brother, in a manner that amounts to distracting him with other conquests, all to Aeneas' growing frustration and eventual rage (12.481-99), especially after Messapus takes aim at him and manages to take off the tip of his helmet and knock the plumes from its crest (12.488-93) – a strikingly different scene from that of the ovation of Juturna's brother. The implicit comparison of Turnus' targets with the food of a swallow (bees, flies) is masterful; Virgil manages both to dehumanize them, and to recall the portent of the bees. Juturna is depicted as doing her part to resist the Trojan invasion of Latium.

Unlike the swallow of the simile, Juturna has no offspring. Her future seems less than propitious: her brother is doomed, and she is relegated to a gray veil and her watery haunts in seeming defeat (12.885-6).

The targets of the Juturna-swallow are Aeneas' Trojans, who are under a certain measure of divine protection in light of the destiny of the Trojan exiles to settle successfully in Latium; in Plutarch, the swallow is said to attack musical cicadas in particular, sacred creatures (*ἱερὸν καὶ μουσικὸν ὄντα*). Plutarch notes that the swallow is known for swooping low and skimming the earth as it

²² On this theme see further West 1979.

hunts; this accords with the image of Juturna flying along in Turnus' chariot. The unpredictable, meandering flight of the swallow is exactly replicated in Juturna's driving, which is able to foil Aeneas (for all his impressive efforts to track his quarry).²³

The reprieve that Juturna secures for her brother is fleeting. What is not revealed to the siblings, however, are the terms that Jupiter and Juno will agree to with respect to the ultimate disposition of Latin affairs (cf. 12.834-7), where the fate of Aeneas' Trojans is arguably less than auspicious (12.835-6 ... *commixti corpore tantum / Teucris subsident*). This could be said to amount to a Latin victory and a Trojan defeat, but only Jupiter and Juno are privy to what they discuss. The image of Juturna picking off Trojan insects across the plain as her brother has his ovation is at least in part a powerful, proleptic vision of the ascendance of Italy. The Trojans will be part of the family tree that descends from Aeneas and Lavinia, as well as the other Trojans who intermarry with Ausonians (*commixti corpore*). In the vivid, gruesome battle simile, another sort of corporal comingling is alluded to, amid the violence of war that precedes Juno's reconciliation.

Juturna departs the scene of her dismissal in bitter surrender, and her brother is slain. The goddess who is compared to a swallow exactly embodies the negative characteristics of the bird cited by Plutarch (*ἡ δὲ χελιδὼν τῷ φύσει μισάνθρωπος εἶναι καὶ δι' ἀπιστίαν ἀτιθάσεντος αἰεὶ καὶ ὑποπτος* (728a)). In mythology, the origin of this negativity is to be found in the the story of Procne. In Virgil, it relates to Juturna's victimhood and the situation involving her brother and the Trojans. At least from a Trojan perspective, the goddess could be described as *ἀτιθάσεντος αἰεὶ καὶ ὑποπτος* in light of her behavior.²⁴ She rebels to the very end against the dictates of Jupiter and destiny, difficult to tame and prone to suspicion (especially when the question is of treaties and agreements (cf. 12.134 ff., where Juno rouses her to see to the breaking of the *foedus* between Aeneas and Latinus).

In Plutarch, the swallow is said to be ungrateful for all it receives (*ἡ δὲ πάντων τυχοῦσα τούτων, ὅταν ἐκθρέψῃ καὶ τελειώσῃ τοὺς νεοσσούς, ἄπεισιν ἀχάριστος γενομένη καὶ ἄπιστος* (727f-728a)). The question of whether Juturna should be grateful for her lot dominates her defiant last words before she takes her leave of the battlefield:

... haec pro uirginitate reponit?
quo uitam dedit aeternam? cur mortis adempta est
condicio? possem tantos finire dolores

²³ It may be noted that at 12.318-23, the identity of the assailant who inflicts a serious wound on Aeneas is left unspecified; Juturna is a possible candidate.

²⁴ We may contrast 10.439-40, where she is depicted as urging Turnus to help Lausus.

nunc certe, et misero fratri comes ire per umbras!
 immortalis ego? aut quicquam mihi dulce meorum
 te sine, frater, erit? o quae satis ima dehiscat
 terra mihi, manisque deam demittat ad imos?' (12.878-84; cf. 12.140-1)

Juturna is an immortal goddess because that was the compensation that Jupiter offered for his assault. Virgil invests Juturna with great dignity and justifiable resentment of her situation. She is well aware that in the eyes of some (principally her attacker), she has been accorded high honors. Indeed, Juno herself thinks exactly that, noting rather insensitively that even she has happily favored Juturna (12.142-5). Juno speaks of Jupiter's *ingratum cubile* (12.144), in a richly connotative insult. His bed is "ungrateful" principally because of how he disrespects his wife. It is also *ingratum* because he does not necessarily favor women like Juturna (after all, her brother will die).

Virgil is precise and deliberate in his language. He makes it clear that Jupiter is the one who made Juturna a goddess (12.140-1 ... *hunc illi rex aetheris altus honorem / Iuppiter erepta pro virginitate sacravit*). But when he quotes Juno's words to Juturna immediately thereafter, he has her take the credit for at least something of Juturna's status: 12.145 *praetulerim caelique libens in parte locarim*. Normally, Juno would object to such celestial honors, but in this case (given what she wants from the nymph), she highlights her willing favor in a masterful application of the rhetorical arts.

But Juno is clear from the start about what Juturna must realize: 12.146 *disce tuum, ne me incuses, Juturna, dolorem*. We may compare 1.9 *quidue dolens* and the *saeui dolores* of 1.25. Juturna must learn what Juno has mastered. She must accept her sorrowful lot and not blame the likes of Juno for her state.

The swallow serves as the consummate comparand for Turnus' sister. Juturna was the victim of assault, which accords with the story of Procne and Philomela. In consequence she is consumed with sentiments of resentment and bitter suspicion and negativity, like Plutarch's swallow. For the bird, these emotions stem from the Procne myth, while for Juturna, they reflect both her assault and her brother's impending doom. The swallow preys on small creatures; she is insectivorous. Plutarch specifies that the swallow has a penchant for cicadas; while Virgil does not mention the musical insect in his epic, he does compare both Trojans and Latins (not to mention Carthaginians) to bees, and bees and flies are also familiar menu morsels for the swallow. Virgil's Juturna-swallow hunts her prey in the empty porticoes of a wealthy residence; this accords with Latinus' palace, where Trojan bees alighted. Juturna is also a goddess of pools and rivers, another classic venue for the swallow's hunting exploits. Juturna is defiant and rebellious, even in the face of the likes of destiny and Jove; Plutarch's swallow is untamable. The bird of the *Symposiaca* is said to lack gratitude for its free lodging; bitter Juturna speaks openly of just how

grateful she should be for her immortal lot, given what she has suffered. Virgil's bird is black, which is both scientifically correct and chromatically fitting as a harbinger of Turnus' doom and his sister's sorrow.²⁵

Virgil's similes do not function simplistically, with straightforward, monovalent associations. That said, they do exhibit scientific verisimilitude that accords well with their context. They serve to recall earlier scenes and images from the narrative, or to anticipate later developments and to provide richer narrative cohesion and color. The Juturna-swallow offers a good example of Virgil's flair for deftly crafting exquisitely apt, formidably polyvalent poetic comparisons.

Plutarch's *Table-Talk* preserves curious lore about why Pythagoreans were said to have recommended keeping swallows out of one's house. Apart from the intrinsic interest of such miscellaneous material for a better understanding of ancient folklore and taboos, the details that Plutarch relates allow for a more nuanced, meaningful appreciation of the full range of implications of Virgil's swallow simile, and of its fitting application to Turnus' divine sister.

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²⁵ On the adjective *niger* in Virgil see Edgeworth, 1992, pp. 138-41.

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