

(3) Habitat

The sighting of the white bird takes place in vineyards. These are usually situated on hilly slopes with trees near by. (The Romans trained their vines on trees). This is short-toed-eagle country – sunny hillsides fringed with forest, maquis, tree groves or parkland. The stork prefers damp meadows or wet lowland pastures – an entirely different habitat.

(4) Food

The diet of the short-toed eagle consists almost entirely of snakes (both poisonous and non-poisonous), which may be anything up to a metre in length ('longis colubris'). Prey is usually carried into the air and manipulated with the feet. The sky-dance display flight, which takes place in spring, involves significant aerial activity, with prey items being repeatedly dropped and caught. Such a spectacular event would clearly command attention.

In comparison the white stork is largely dependent upon insects and mice or aquatic organisms. Grasshoppers, crickets, locusts and frogs also feature prominently. Small snakes may be taken but they are not the main dietary component. Pellet analysis in May and June ('blushing spring') reveals mostly insects, mammals and earthworms (see Cramp and Simmons [1977] i). Prey is swallowed whole and is taken walking or running with the head or bill pointing downward – not a particularly dramatic method of hunting. The misleading association of storks with snakes probably arises from too narrow an interpretation of 'serpentes' (as in Juv. 14.74–5), as opposed to its meaning of 'creepy crawlies' in general. Storks certainly eat 'serpents', but not usually snakes. To quote Edward Topsell: 'By serpents we understand...all venomous beasts whether creeping without legges, as adders and snakes, or with legges as crocodiles and lizards, or more nearly compacted bodies, as toades, spiders and bees; following heerin the warrant of the best ancient Latinists' ('The Historie of Serpents', 1608).

(5) The Text

This refers specifically to a white bird that appears in spring, in the neighbourhood of vineyards, and attacks long snakes (not serpents). 'Invisa' suggests fear and hatred of a traditional foe, a natural enemy – this is no casual or opportunist encounter. The background is the cycle of the seasons, where an habitual event is needed as an indicator. Virgil may have chosen the arrival of the eagle because shortly before, in vv. 279–83, he had compared the setting out of a vineyard to the deploying of a legion for battle; an omen relevant to the standard would be appropriate.

In spite of the absence of a scientific ornithological classification, Virgil leaves valid information as to the identity of 'candida avis'. Appearance, behaviour, distribution and habitat all point towards its being a light-phase short-toed eagle, *Circaetus gallicus*, rather than *Ciconia ciconia*, the white stork.

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VIRGIL, *AENEID* 7.620–2

Tum regina deum caelo delapsa morantis
Impulit ipsa manu portas, et cardine verso
Belli ferratos rumpit Saturnia postis.

Virgilian scholars appear not to have appreciated the full dramatic significance of this

passage, which provides a further example of Virgil's use of divine intervention in events which he wishes to mark as particularly significant in the course of the poem.¹ These three lines signal the onset of the war with which the remainder of the *Aeneid* will be concerned; since line 607, Virgil has been working towards them by means of a detailed description of the gates of war themselves and of the tradition attached to them. But at this point in Italian history there is an ominous departure from the traditional procedures regarding the declaration of war. Latinus, who according to what Virgil depicts as the already well-established tradition² was bound to open the gates in order to mark the beginning of war against the Trojans, has refused in horror to carry out his duty, opposed as he is to the turn recent events have taken in Latium. At this point Juno intervenes dramatically, as she had intervened before to sow the seeds of the 'horrida bella' (6.86, 7.41) between the Trojans and the indigenous population (323ff.). Virgil depicts her as sweeping down from heaven in person³ in order to push open the gates. The reader is shown how at her touch the gates burst open ('rumpit') without the involvement of any human or visible agency. It is an action which apparently has only a supernatural explanation,⁴ clearly described to the reader as the work of Juno.⁵ This occurrence has exactly and immediately the effect which Juno desires, 'ardet inexcita Ausonia atque immobilis ante' (623), and the two sides begin to move against each other for the war which will cost both of them so many lives.

In this passage Virgil has carefully built up the horror to the climactic point of Juno's personal intervention. The gates themselves are described as 'religione sacrae et saevi formidine Martis' (608) and 'tristis portas' (617); and Latinus, not wishing to sanction the onset of a 'lacrimabile bellum' (604), recoils from fulfilling his 'foeda ministeria' (619). Indeed, already at lines 583-4 the war has been unequivocally described to the reader as 'infandum', 'contra omina' and 'contra fata deum'. The ultimate horror, however, is expressed in lines 620-2, for behind them surely lies the belief, widespread in antiquity,⁶ that the automatic opening of doors or gates was a bad omen.⁷

¹ This is even more obviously the case with such episodes as the storm which drives Aeneas and his ships onto the shores of Africa and the awakening of Dido's love for Aeneas in Book 1, and Aeneas' decision to leave Troy at the end of Book 2.

² Cf. G. Williams, *Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* (Yale University, 1983), 137-8.

³ Virgil's use of Juno for this momentous action may be compared with a similar picture to be found in a fragment of Ennius, where it is the personification Discordia who opens the gates of war:

postquam Discordia taetra

Belli ferratos postes portasque refregit (*Ann.* 225-6 Skutsch).

It is noteworthy that Virgil decided not to make use of either Allecto or Discordia here, presumably because they were only minor daemonic forces whose intervention at this point would be less dramatically effective than that of the 'regina deum' herself; also, the opening of the gates of war is not as appropriate to the character of Allecto as is the task of inflaming the passions of Amata, Turnus and the rural population, for she is not to be simply identified with Discordia. Cf. B. Otis, *Virgil. A study in civilized poetry* (Oxford, 1964), 326-7; Williams op. cit. 24; F. Klingner, *Virgil* (Zurich, 1967), 511-15, 523-6.

⁴ This may be the only instance in the *Aeneid* of divine intervention which cannot be given an alternative, 'natural' explanation, unlike, for example, the sudden onset of the storm in Book 1.

⁵ O. Weinreich, in 'Türöffnung im Wunder-, Prodigien- und Zauberglauben der Antike, des Judentums und Christentums', *Tüb. Beitr. zur Altertumswissenschaft* 5 (1929), 267 n. 22, strangely denies that the opening of the gates of war in the *Aeneid* can be classed as a *Wunder* because it is stated which god is responsible: he contrasts it in this respect with Claudian, *De Raptu Proserpinae* 2.6ff.

⁶ M. B. Ogle, 'The house door in Greek and Roman religion and folklore', *AJP* 32 (1911), 251-71.

⁷ Cf. Cicero, *De Div.* 2.67; Suetonius, *Div. Iul.* 81 and *Ner.* 46.

Awareness of such a superstition will affect our interpretation of Juno's action and our view of the effect it has on the Italians. In this brief but potent and climactic episode the Italians are unable to see Juno⁸ and only witness the effect of her sudden intervention. Not only does this come as an evident shock but the ominous nature of the gates' opening also foreshadows the grim intensity of the war to come and perhaps also the tragic outcome for the Italians themselves.⁹ As when the Wooden Horse stumbles on the threshold of Troy, however, the evil omen is disregarded by the characters themselves,¹⁰ and it is for the reader to notice the significance of these events in the wider context of the *Aeneid*. This is not the only instance in the poem where Virgil expects his readers to be alert to resonances which are not obvious to the characters involved in the action.¹¹

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⁸ Similarly, Amata and Turnus are unable to recognise Allecto: she reveals her hellish origin to Turnus when provoked, but he does not identify her of his own accord.

⁹ Such sinister hints are also evident in Juno's monologue (*Aen.* 7.293–322) when she says 'sanguine Troiano et Rutulo dotabere, virgo' and 'funestaeque iterum recidiva in Pergama taedae'.

¹⁰ 2.242–3; cf. R. Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik* (4th ed. Stuttgart, 1957), 316–17.

¹¹ Cf. for example the baleful implications of the simile at *Aen.* 10.272–5 and the comments of Williams op. cit. 65: here, under cover of the simile, the reader is given information about Aeneas which is not available to Turnus in his misguided interpretation of the situation.

CORRIGENDUM

In *CQ* 34 (1984), 457, on Lucan 4.664 *indulsit castris*, I wrote 'Housman... explains "...inuitantibus ad desidiam": read rather *ad temeritatem*'. Mr S. J. Heyworth has kindly pointed out to me that Housman in his corrected impression (1927) does in fact write *temeritatem*. I was myself (as was evidently *TLL* vii. i. 1252. 10ff.) using the first impression (1926), where H. has *desidiam*. It had not occurred to me that H. would so drastically alter an interpretation in a 'Second impression (corrected)'.

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NESTOR'S WAR EFFORT (STAT. *ACH.* 1.422)

aera domat Temese, quatitur navalibus ora
Eubois, innumera resonant incude Mycenae,
Pisa novat currus, Nemee dat terga ferarum,
Cirrha sagittiferas certat stipare pharetras,
Lerna gravis clipeos caesis vestire iuvenis.
dat bello pedites Aetolus et asper Acarnan,
Argos agit turmas, vacuantur pascua ditis
Arcadiae, frenat celeres Epiros alumnos,
Phocis et Aoniae iaculis rarescitis umbrae,
murorum tormenta Pylos Messenaeque tendunt.

(Statius, *Ach.* 1.413–22)

Here in the *Achilleid* Statius catalogues the contributions of Greek towns to Agamemnon's expedition against Troy. Every item of equipment is appropriate to its