VERG. AEN. 8,588: PALLAS GOES TO BATTLE*

... ipse agmine Pallas
it medio chlamyde et pictis conspectus in armis,
qualis ubi Oceani perfusus Lucifer unda

This is the text printed by R. A. B. Mynors¹ who accepts Markland’s conjecture it instead of the transmitted in. C. J. Fordyce² also accepts it and comments ad loc.: “it removes a weak repetition of in and restores Virgilian idiom” (cf. for example 4,130 it portis ... delecta inventus; 4,404 it nigrum campis agmen; 8,557 ... it timor; 9,499 it gemitus; 9,664 it clamor; 11,90 bellator equus it lacrimans: at the beginning of the line, but also “at the beginning of a sentence within the line”: Fordyce, ad loc.). The text printed by Mynors is convincing not only – as noted by the commentators – because it restitutes a Virgilian stylistic ‘property’, but also because it restores a distinctively epic simile-pattern (it + qualis, that is verb of motion + simile). And the model made recognizable by this textual choice can be traced, as one might expect, back to Homer. A somewhat fixed simile-pattern does, in fact, recur in the Iliad, where certain characters’ actions (for example entering the battle, moving forward and so on) are represented through an astronomical simile³: cf. especially Il. 4,74–8 (Athena descends from Olympus like a bright star):

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3) A slightly different instance is represented by Il. 5,4–8 (already in Fordyce, ad loc.), where Diomedes’ entry in the battle is marked as well by an astronomical simile. There, however, the comparison to Sirios concerns the warrior’s helmet and shield: δειάς οί ἐκ κόρυθός τε καὶ ἀσπίδας ἀκάματαν πῦρ, / ἀστέριά ὀπωρίνῳ ἐναλίγκιον, ὡς τε μάλιστα / λαμπρὸν παμφαίνησι λελουμένος
β ἡ δὲ κατ’ Ὀὐλύμποιο καρῆνον ἀίξασα.
oiν δ’ ἀστέρα ἤκε Κρόνου πάις ἀγκυλομήτεω
ἡ ναύτησι τέρας ἢν στρατῷ εὐρεῖ λαῶν,
λαμπρόν· τοῦ δὲ τε πολλοὶ ἀπὸ σπινθήρες ἦνται·
tῷ ἐκ φυ’ ἦξεν ἐπὶ χόνα Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.

Cf. also Il. 19,397–8 (Achilles):

… ὀπιθεὶν δὲ κορυσσάμενος β ἡ Ἀχίλλεὺς,
τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὥς τ’ ἀλέξτωρ Ἑπερίων.

However, the astronomical comparison is not always to be expected: also the combined presence of a verb of motion at the beginning of the line and a different simile is worth noticing: cf. for example Il. 15,169–70 (Iris is coming down from Ida such as when hail or snow falls from clouds):⁴

β ἡ δὲ κατ’ Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἐς Ἰλιον ἴρήν.
ὡς δ’ ὦτ’ ἄν ἐκ νεφέων πτῆται νιφὰς ἢν χάλαζα.

The Iliadic text provides here a sort of ‘epic’ pattern the memory of which is effectively reactivated by the conjecture it, all the more so in a Virgilian passage which is highly epic (and allusively Homeric).