

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 iuventus*; 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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1) Cf. R. A. B. Mynors, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford 1986).

2) Cf. C. J. Fordyce, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos libri VII–VIII* (Oxford 1977).

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 Sirius concerns the warrior's helmet and shield: δαίε οἱ ἐκ κόρυθός τε καὶ ἀσπίδος ἀκάματον πῦρ, / ἀστέρ' ὀπωρινῷ ἐναλίγκιον, ὅς τε μάλιστα / λαμπρὸν παμφαίνῃσι λελουμένος

βῆ δὲ κατ' Οὐλύμποιο καρήνων ἀΐξασα.
οἶον δ' ἄστέρᾱ ἦκε Κρόνου πάϊς ἀγκυλομήτεω
ἢ ναύτησι τέρας ἢ ἐ στρατῶ εὐρέϊ λαῶν,
λαμπρόν· τοῦ δέ τε πολλοὶ ἀπὸ σπινθῆρες ἴενται·
τῶ ἐῖκυϊ' ἦϊξεν ἐπὶ χθόνα Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.

Cf. also Il. 19,397–8 (Achilles):

... ὄπιθεν δὲ κορυσσάμενος βῆ Ἀχιλλεύς,
τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὥς τ' ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων.

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

βῆ δὲ κατ' Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἐς Ἴλιον ἱρήν.
ὥς δ' ὄτ' ἄν ἐκ νεφέων πτήται νιφὰς ἢ ἐ 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).