



## Virgil Aeneid XI

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### A Worked Example

We shall now take a few lines from Book XI and analyse them stylistically.

at medias inter caedes exsultat Amazon  
unum exserta latus pugnae, pharetrata Camilla,  
et nunc lenta manu spargens hastilia denset,  
nunc validam dextra rapit indefessa bipennem;  
aureus ex umero sonat arcus et arma Dianae. (648-52)

The passage begins with the strong *at* ('but'), introducing a distinct change of scene or theme; here it marks the transition from a general battle scene to the individual actions of Camilla.

Virgil uses a strong verb, *exsultat* (literally 'springs up' but here either 'dashes about' or 'runs amok'), giving us a picture of a woman revelling in the battle. This is reinforced by the use of the metaphor *Amazon*: Camilla was not merely *like* an Amazon, but in effect *was* an Amazon. Amazons were the archetypal female warriors, the equal of men on the battlefield; the name here is deferred to the end of the line, keeping us waiting until the climax. Amazons were frequently depicted as having one breast bared so that clothing did not hinder their use of the bow; in 649 *unum exserta latus* tells us that Camilla had modelled herself on the Amazons even to this extent.

As with *Amazon*, so *Camilla* is left until the end of the line for dramatic effect: the true subject of this episode is only named after two lines of description of her. Her description as *pharetrata* ('wearing a quiver'), a word uncommon enough to surprise the reader, again marks her out as being like an Amazon.

In 650-1, the anaphora of *nunc ... nunc* ('one moment ... the next') has the effect of emphasizing the versatility of Camilla's fighting skills as she switches from one type of weapon to another.

In 650 Virgil plays a little trick on us with *lenta manu*: at first glance it would appear that these two words belong together: 'with her steady hand'; scanning the line, however, will show immediately that *lentā* cannot be ablative to agree with *manu*; it must therefore qualify *hastilia* (neuter plural), meaning 'flexible javelins'; this is a graphic description, as anyone who has seen a javelin thrown will know that it flexes or vibrates as it flies.

The phrase *spargens hastilia denset* is unusual and effective in several ways. Firstly *spargens* means 'scattering', suggesting a large number of javelins being thrown in various directions; this idea is reinforced by *denset* (literally 'she makes thick'), which here is used metaphorically to mean 'she hurls in dense volleys'. The whole phrase is hyperbolic, since mounted warriors would normally have carried no more than two throwing-spears; Camilla appears to have



dozens of them. The intention is to make her appear superhuman, in the sense that her fighting skills and battle successes raised her far above the average.

In 651 Virgil plays the same trick on us again: the juxtaposition of *validam dextra* suggests a strong right hand, but of course *validam* describes *bipennem* ('her strong axe'). This example of hyperbaton also places *indefessa* ('tireless') next to *bipennem*, forging a link in sense if not in syntax.

In 652 the first word *aureus* ('golden'), in such an emphatic position and long before the noun it describes is mentioned, places great emphasis on the prize quality of Camilla's bow.

The tautological *arcus et arma Dianae* (the bow *is* the weapon of Diana) has the effect of placing emphasis on *Dianae*, reinforced by her position at the end of the line; this is to remind us that Camilla not only resembled a fabled Amazon queen, but went one better than that, taking on the role of a goddess (who was regularly portrayed with bow and quiver).

The assonance and consonance of *aureus*, *arcus* and *arma* place a spotlight on the weapon, indicating its importance in the depiction of Camilla.

This line is also fully dactylic, reflecting the rapidity of Camilla's shooting.

The use of *lenta*, *aureus* and *sonat* ('resounds') adds visual and aural effects to the scene, bringing it to life.

The above analysis is certainly not exhaustive, but it gives some indication of the sheer volume and variety of stylistic features that can be found in just a few lines of Virgil's poetry – and these lines are not unusual. No one would expect an inexperienced reader to identify all these features unaided, and examination candidates would do well to incorporate half of them into an answer.

One 'failing' in the above analysis is the lack of any overall focus. An examination question will generally contain key trigger words (such as 'exciting', 'dramatic') to channel the candidate's response. Thus, when answering a question such as 'How does Virgil make Camilla appear heroic in these lines?', the candidate must be careful to show how each of the points made enhances Camilla's heroic qualities. This means that some of the points made above may be irrelevant to this particular response, though they may be relevant to others.

A careful examination of the above analysis will show several principles at work:

- the meaning of every Latin word quoted should be given, whether in straight translation or emerging from the discussion
- every point should be related to its context, i.e. what is being described
- the intention of the poet or the effect on the reader should be evaluated for every point.
- for most of the points the order is sequential, i.e. the analysis proceeds line by line. This is generally the more straightforward method of analysis, but its potential drawbacks are (i) that it can easily generate little more than a sterile list of devices and (ii) that it can lead to an imbalanced focus on the first few lines of a passage, with later lines ignored because of time pressures.



B L O O M S B U R Y

- the final point is thematic, i.e. it draws out a particular theme from the passage, giving several examples to support the analysis. This approach is particularly useful if the candidate is called upon to consider several themes in an analysis; it is also useful when analysing longer passages, where time does not allow every point to be included. Here it may be preferable to divide up the analysis into themes such as sound effects, use of metre, choice of words, use of imagery, position of words, and so on (there are alternative sets of themes, such as positive / negative; dramatic / exciting / forceful).