

PROPIVSQVE PERICLO IT TIMOR: *AENEID* 8. 556-7

My purpose is to compare the different explanations that have been offered of the expression *propius periclo it timor*. This is its context. Evander, king of Pallanteum, has decided to send cavalry under the command of his son Pallas to assist the Trojans and Etruscans in the war against Turnus. When a report spreads that the cavalry are about to set out, the mothers of the soldiers are alarmed.

uota metu duplicant matres, propiusque periclo
it timor et maior Martis iam apparet imago.

'The mothers redouble their vows in fear, fear goes closer to (or in) the danger, and the image of Mars appears greater.' James Henry¹ writes: 'The women, who had previously . . . made vows, felt fear, and seen the image of war before them (viz. in their minds), now, when the war has thus come to their very door, . . . double their vows, feel a sharper fear, and see their picture, image, or idea of war larger than it was before.' But *propius periclo* it has been explained in other ways. Some think *periclo* dative, other (like James Henry) ablative. Conington² increases the confusion by citing the explanations of Heyne and Wagner as if they were compatible with his own translation. He writes: '“Propius” etc., “fear treads more closely on the heels of danger,” probably including both the notion that as danger is nearer fear is greater (Heyne), and the conception of fear as coming nearer the danger by anticipating it (Wagner). Cerda compares Aristotle *Rhet.* 2. 5, τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ κίνδυνος, φοβεροῦ πλησιασμός.'

Aristotle is saying that danger means the approach of something frightening. The point of Cerda's comparison will be clearer if the earlier part of his quotation from Aristotle is considered.³ 'Men do not fear all evils . . . but only such as involve great pain or destruction, and only if they appear to be not far off but near at hand and threatening, for men do not fear things that are very remote.' In Cerda's opinion Aristotle's definition of fear can be applied to Virgil's *timor*, which means fear of imminent evil. Our attitude to remote evil is not *timor* but *metus*. 'Metus quippe de re longinqua, timor de propinqua' says Cerda.⁴ Wagner⁵ agrees: 'Remotiora pericula metuimus, instantia time-mus.' This distinction is false. Page⁶ cites Silius Italicus 1. 32 and 4. 772 to show that *metuo* and *metus* can mean fear of imminent evils. There are also passages in which the words are used together as synonyms, e.g. Lucan 1. 460 *timorum maximus* . . . *leti metus*, and Sallust *Catiline* 52. 16 in *tanto omnium metu solus non timet*. Besides, the context makes such a contrast between *metus* and *timor* inappropriate. Both words describe the mothers' feelings when they hear that the cavalry are about to set out, when the danger is near and the alarm acute.

¹ James Henry, *Aeneidea*, Dublin, 1873-89.

² *Vergili Opera*, ed. John Conington, Whittaker and Co., 1872-83.

³ *Art of Rhetoric* 2. 5, Loeb translation by J. H. Freese, 1947.

⁴ *Postiores sex libri Aeneidos*, ed. J. L. de la

Cerda, Lyons, 1617.

⁵ *Virgilio Carmina*, ed. G. P. E. Wagner, 3rd edition, Libraria Hahniana, 1861.

⁶ *Aeneid*, ed. T. E. Page, Macmillan and Co., 1894-1900.

The passages quoted by Cerda as parallels to 'fear went closer to danger' show that he took it in the same sense as Wagner¹ and Voss,² who translate: 'They saw the danger near', 'They feared a nearer danger'. Süpfle,³ who supposes that the women exaggerate the imminence of the danger, writes: 'Fear pictures the distant danger as a near danger.'

Conington besides translating *propiusque periclo it timor* gave two explanations of its meaning. One he took from Wagner: 'Fear comes nearer the danger by anticipating it.' By 'anticipating' Conington presumably means 'expecting', 'foreseeing', since Wagner says that the women see the danger is near. This explanation does not suit Conington's translation. Conington has created a vivid picture. When we read 'Fear treads more closely on the heels of Danger' we see two giants walking towards the city, Danger in front and Fear close behind. If Wagner, Voss, or Süpfle had tried to illustrate his explanation with an allegorical picture he would have shown Fear going to *meet* Danger. Danger might still be shown as a giant striding towards Pallanteum, but Fear would arise in the hearts of the mothers and leave the city, meeting Danger face to face.

Conington also quotes with approval Heyne's explanation that as danger is nearer fear is greater, but Conington's translation would not have pleased Heyne any more than Wagner. Heyne offered three separate explanations, but in none of them does fear go closer to danger. His first suggestion is that *it* should be emended to *et*:

propiusque periclo
et timor et maior Martis iam apparet imago.

This means: 'When things have nearly reached a crisis (*propius periclo*) fear appears greater (*timor apparet maior*) and the image of Mars appears greater.' This does not satisfy me because the growth of fear is not apparent but real. Without the emendation Heyne finds it hard to explain the text to his satisfaction. He would like *timor it maior* to mean 'Fear walks greater' but feels that this strains the Latin too far. He therefore suggests that we take *periclo* as ablative, 'in the danger'. *Timor it propius* will have to mean *timor fit propior*, that is 'Fear draws closer (to the mothers)', 'Fear becomes keener'. This explanation is also adopted by T. E. Page and James Henry.

To show that *timor fit propior* is good Latin James Henry quotes Tacitus *Agricola* 16: *tenentibus arma plerisque quos conscientia defectionis et PROPIVS ex legato TIMOR agitabat*; Silius 1. 32: *iam PROPIVS metuens*; Silius 4. 772: *sed PROPIOR METVS armati ductoris ab ira, Et magna ante oculos stabat genitoris imago*. He might also have quoted Lucan 10. 47: *propius timuere*. Unfortunately, in *Agricola* 16 some editors read *proprius* for *propius*; Silius 1. 32 may mean 'fearing a nearer danger' and not 'feeling a keener fear'; and Lucan 10. 47 may mean 'they feared a nearer enemy'. Silius 4. 772 is the strongest evidence in James Henry's favour. It could be compared with Livy 7. 21. 3 *propior dolor plebi fenoris ingrauescentis erat*, of which the Loeb translation is: 'The plebs were more concerned with the distress they suffered from the increasing weight

¹ See the 4th edition (by Wagner) of C. G. Heyne's *Virgilii Opera*, Leipzig, 1830-41.

² See note on p. 226 of J. H. Voss, *Anmerkungen und Randglossen zu Griechen und*

Römern, edited by Abraham Voss, published by Immanuel Muller, Leipzig, 1838.

³ *Virgilii Opera*, ed. K. F. Süpfle, published by Groos, Karlsruhe, 1842.

of usury.' These passages, however, though they may justify *timor fit propior matribus*, do not justify *timor it propius matribus*, and only one of them (Silius 1. 32) could be taken to mean 'The fear has grown keener than it was before.'

Conington's translation is not only incompatible with the explanations of Wagner and Heyne; it is in itself meaningless. 'Fear approaches Pallanteum' means 'The women in Pallanteum will soon be frightened.' 'Danger approaches' means 'They will soon be in danger.' If Fear reaches the city first, they will be frightened before they are in danger. If Danger reaches the city first, they will not feel fear till they are already in danger. All Conington tells us, however, is that at the moment Fear is the more distant of the two, but as Fear is walking faster and catching up with Danger ('treads *more closely*') there is a chance that after all it will be Fear that reaches Pallanteum first.

I remain uncertain what Virgil meant by *propiusque periclo it timor*, but I think that the women's fear is moving from Pallanteum towards the danger. The Budé translation has 'Their fear approaches the danger; already the image of Mars grows bigger in their eyes.'

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