



READING
LATIN
POETRY



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RES METRICA

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CONCENTRATION of detail and intensity of expression distinguish poetry from prose. Although both poetry and prose may communicate through form, poetry does so with greater precision and subtlety so that the connection between the concentration of detail and intensity of expression looms larger than in prose. The close organization of a poem, especially in Latin poetry, is most obvious in the use of rhythmical language. Rhythm is frequently regarded as the chief distinction between poetry and prose. But, prose, as almost any passage of Cicero's orations or philosophical essays demonstrates, also embodies rhythm. The use of rhythmical language as a criterion of difference is false, for it is one of degree, not of kind. Rhythm is one among the many elements of a poem. Its value lies in its power "to modulate and define emotion, so that a finer adjustment of emotion to thought may be possible."¹ Rhythm, then, is one of the means of organizing a poem.

In Latin poetry, rhythm is based primarily on a pattern of long and short syllables. The unit of rhythm is the *foot*. The arrangement of feet in verses is the *meter*; e.g., the hexameter which is a succession of five feet, either dactyls or spondees, plus one spondee or a dactyl with one short syllable missing. In lyric poetry several such meters are arranged into stanzaic forms, which have acquired certain names, such as the Alcaic, the Sapphic, the Elegiac. We shall go more fully into these matters later.

Metrics in Latin require more attention than in English be-

¹ Yvor Winters, *On Modern Poets* (Meridian Books, New York, 1959), 145.

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RES METRICA

cause of our unfamiliarity with the metrical units and stanzaic forms. Moreover, Latin is a foreign tongue in which we only rarely feel "at home." Because of our familiarity with English, metrics in English poetry do not create such a seemingly enormous block to our grasp of the poem. Latin metrics are not so difficult that we cannot, with some practice, come to an awareness of their effect. In understanding metrics, as in all other skills, ease comes with familiarity.

Classical Latin poetry, being based primarily on a pattern of long and short syllables, is called quantitative verse. Latin also has a stress accent, i.e., the accented sound is uttered more loudly than the unaccented, which to some degree affects the rhythm, but for classical poetry (all the poems in this book, for example), stress is of somewhat minor importance.

"Long and short syllables" refers roughly to the length of time it takes to utter the sound of the syllable. Classical writers felt that a long syllable took twice as long to utter as a short one. But in order to know the quantity of a syllable, i.e., the length of time required, one has first to know what the syllable consists of, and where it begins and ends. Hence syllabic division is the first step in mastering Latin prosody. Every syllable in Latin contains either a vowel or a diphthong, and a Latin word has as many syllables as it has vowels and diphthongs. The syllable may consist solely of a vowel or diphthong, or may have consonants on either side or on both sides of it, e.g., *a-gres-tis*, *de-us*.

I. Within a word a syllable ends (A) with its vowel or diphthong if another vowel or diphthong immediately follows, or (B) if the succeeding consonants or consonant can normally begin a word in classical Latin, e.g., *de-a*, *me-o*, *re-gi-na*, *pu-bli-cum*, *a-qua*, *a-c-vi*.

II. Within the word a syllable ends with a consonant or consonants only when the consonants do not normally occur at the beginning of a word in classical Latin. No word begins with such combinations as *rb*, *mb*, *lp*, *ll*, *rr*, *tt*, *gn*, *mn*, *ps*, *ntr*, or *nct*, or *ct*.

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Therefore, within a word the division occurs between those letters, e.g., *ar-bo-re, am-bo, cul-pa, mole, fer-re, mt-to; ig-nis, om-ni, ip-se; an-tro; sanc-to*. Words like *gnomon, Memosyne, psittacus*, and *Ctesiphon* are Greek in origin, and such words as *gnarus* are archaic. They are not classical words. X and z are double consonants, for they represent, respectively, *cs* and *ds*. Such words as *saxo, exeo, gaza* are divided: *sac-so; ec-se-o; gad-sa*.

Three exceptions occur to I (B). The first concerns *s* within the word. Although *s* and one or more consonants may begin a classical Latin word, the same group may not begin a syllable within a word. The *s* goes with the preceding syllable:

sci-o but *fas-ca*
spe-ro but *as-pe-ria*
stre-mu-as but *cas-tra*

The second exception involves words compounded with a preposition ending in a mute (g, d, b, c, [k], t, p,) followed by a liquid (l or r). In such words the division occurs immediately after the prepositional element, e.g., *ab-ri-pi-o, ob-ru-o, sub-li-mi*.

The third exception concerns any word where a liquid follows a mute. Here poets allowed themselves freedom of choice, for the mute and the liquid could either go together or be divided, e.g., *pa-tris* or *pat-ris; a-gris* or *ag-ris*. The division in this case depends on the exigencies of the metrical pattern.

One may infer that because of these exceptions one should divide *monstro* as *mons-tro* not *mon-stro*, but *constitisse* as *con-sti-tis-se* not *cons-ti-tis-se* and *inscia* as *in-sci-a* not *ins-ci-a*, and similarly with words such as *abs-ci-do, abs-te-mi-a*. But all such syllabification is inferential.

Greek words were generally treated as Latin ones, but occasionally one finds exceptions wherein a word is divided as though it were Greek, e.g., *At-las* and *A-tlas* both occur.

Liaison

One further point needs to be observed before we move to a consideration of the quantity of syllables, and that is liaison. In the

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pronunciation of Latin words in both poetry and prose, liaison occurs in the following ways between the final syllable of one word and the initial syllable of the next word:

I. If a word ends with a consonant other than *m* and is followed by a word beginning with a vowel or diphthong, alone or preceded only by *h*, the final consonant is detached from the first word and joined to the initial syllable of the next, e.g.,

hoc ut dic-sit A-mor si-nis-tra ut an-te (Cat. XLV.8.)
nunc a-b aus-spi-ci-o bo-no pro-fec-ti (Cat. XLV.19.)
mu-tu-i-s a-ni-mi-s a-man-t a-man-tur (Cat. XLV.20.)

II. If a word ends in a vowel or diphthong (with or without *m*) and comes before a word beginning with a vowel or diphthong, either alone or preceded only by *h*, the final vowel of the first word is elided. Hence this form of liaison is called elision, a squeezing out. The two syllables are reduced to one whose character is mainly that of the second vowel or diphthong, although a trace of the first vowel or diphthong is felt to be there, e.g.,

il-l^hest, tu le-ni-or cor-i-c^he-tim-pro-bo (Hor. O. III.9.22)
te-cum ui-ue-r^he a-mem, te-c^ham ob-e-am li-bens (Hor. O. III.9.24)

sae-pe ma-l^hoc no-bis, si mens non lae-va fuis-set
(Vergil *Ecl.* I.16)

Initial *h* in classical Latin was either not pronounced or very faintly pronounced. Every *h* should be bracketed in scanning. Final *m*, when followed by an initial vowel or diphthong, apparently imparted only a nasal quality to the preceding vowel. When followed by a consonant, final *m* is, of course, pronounced, e.g., *tecum uiuere*. Occasionally we find two words which do not elide although all the conditions for elision are present. This failure of elision is called *hiatus*, e.g., *deferri*. "name," *inquii puellae* (Cat. X.27). No elision occurs between the *e* of *name* and the *i* of *inquii* although it seems possible. The poet wants a pause after *name*, to emphasize the word by separating it from *inquii*.

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III. When a word ending in a vowel or a vowel plus *m* precedes *es* or *est* (from *esse*), prodelision occurs, for the *e* of *es* or *est* is elided. Thus:

femina est or *bonum est* becomes

femina est or *bonu(m) est*.

When a colloquial effect is especially desired, prodelisions frequently occur with *-us es* or *est*:

iratus es becomes *iratu's*

audiendus est becomes *audiendu'st*.

Such are the possibilities of liaison in classical Latin poetry. They are all frequent and must be carefully observed. No liaison, however, occurs when one word ends in a consonant and the next begins with a consonant other than *h* or when one word ends with a vowel and the next begins with a consonant. (Liaison between verses will be taken up later.)

Test your ability in syllabification by dividing into syllables all the words of one of the poems in the first section of this book and indicating all the forms of liaison which occur.

Quantity of Syllables

Before we can assign the quantity of a Latin syllable, we should determine whether it is open or closed. An open syllable ends in a vowel or diphthong, e.g., *a-qua*, *ma-la*. A closed syllable ends in a consonant or consonants, e.g., *cer-tum*, *com-dit*.

An open syllable has the quantity of its vowel or diphthong. It is, therefore, long if it has a long vowel or diphthong and short if it has a short vowel: *á-qua* (abl.), *bô-nâ*, *mâ-lâ*, *á-mi-mo*, *caë-lô*, *â-qua*.

All closed syllables are long, regardless of the quantity of the vowel. The syllables *est* and *est* are both long, for both are closed, although the *e* is long in one word and short in the other. The words *infelix* and *inductus* both have long first syllables, although only the *i* of the prefix of *infelix* is long. Since syllables, not vowels,

are the units of classical verse, the quantity of the syllable is what must be determined.

Some apparent exceptions exist to what has been said about open and closed syllables. *Hic* (masculine nominative singular) and *hœc* (neuter nominative singular) both have short vowels. *Hoc* was originally *hœd-ce* with a short *o*. This first changed to *hoc-ce* and then to *hœc* with short *o*. But in classical Latin, despite the spelling, the pronunciation, especially before words beginning with a vowel or *h* plus a vowel, was *hœcc*. Hence in syllabifying it is necessary to restore the second *c*, e.g.,

(h) oc-c opu-s (h) ic la-bo-r est (Vergil, *Aen.* VI.129)

The syllable, *hœc*, is long, for it is closed.

Hic began as *hœ-ce*, which became *hœc*, then *hœc*, and finally *hic*. The second *c*, as in *hœc(c)*, is technically not legitimate to the word so that a scansion such as the following occurs:

(h) ic u-r (h) y-c est . . . (Vergil, *Aen.* VI.791)

But, because of the close association with *hœc(c)*, *hic* acquired an extra *c* so that we usually find:

(h) ic-c â-ri-ê-nus ô-uis cûs-tôs . . . (Vergil, *Ecl.* III.5)

Be careful to distinguish this *hic* from *hic*, the adverb, whose vowel is always long and whose *c* is single.

In words such as *ai-o*, *ei-us*, *mai-or*, *pei-or*, *Gai-us*, *Mai-a*, and *Troi-a*, the first vowel is short, though the syllable is long. What has happened is that the consonantal *i* was doubled in pronunciation and was even sometimes spelled *ai-io*, *ei-ius*, *mai-ior*, *pei-ior*, etc. Hence, although the vowel is short, the syllable, because it is closed, is long. This same phenomenon occurs with the compounds and derivatives of *iacere*: *eicere*, *obicere*, *subicere*, *obex*, etc. The *i* must be doubled in scansion:

ob-î-ci-t-î-l-le (Vergil, *Aen.* VI.421)

The *o* of *ob* is short, but the syllable is long.

Return now to the passage previously divided into syllables

and in which liaisons were indicated, and mark the quantity of every syllable.

Meters

Theoretically, we have all the information we need to work out the metrical arrangement of any verse of poetry. In a sense this is correct, for if the words are properly pronounced and the quantities of the syllables given clearly, the metrics of every verse become apparent, or will become so with practice. However, some additional information is useful, especially for the beginner.

The meter most frequently encountered by students in Latin poetry is the hexameter, and that will do well as a beginning for these comments on metrics. The ideal hexameter is a line consisting of six dactyls:

— ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

Each dactyl or spondee is called a foot. In any foot the poet may substitute a spondee for the dactyl. The verse could then appear:

— — | — — | — — | — — | — — | — —

In the usual hexameter, however, the last foot is not a true dactyl but either a dactyl with one short syllable missing or a spondee. Further, the fifth foot almost always is a dactyl. When a spondee does occur in that position, the verse is called spondaic, no matter what kind of foot appears in the first four feet. What usually happens in hexameters is indicated by the following passage from Statius' *Silvae*:

Cri-mi-ne quo me-ru-ī, iu-ue-nis pla-ci-dis-si-me di uum,
 quo-ue er-ro-re mi-ser, do-ni-s ur-so-lu-s e-ge-rem,
 Som-ne, tu-is; tā-ce-t-gm-ne pe-cus uo-lu-eres-que fe-rae-que
 et si-nu-lant fes-sos cur-ta-tā ca-cu-mi-na som-nos,
 nec tru-ci-bus flu-mi-s i-dem so-nu-s; oc-ci-di-t (h) or-ro-
 ae-quo-ri-s, et ter-tis ma-ri-χ ad-chi-na-ta qui-es-cunt.

(*Silvae* V. 4. 1-6)

The first verse clearly indicates the metrical pattern, beginning

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with the normal dactylic hexameter verse. The other verses vary that pattern.

Some other observations, which will hold true for other types of meter as well, need to be made. In reading poetry the necessity of pausing, either at the end of the verse or within it, becomes apparent. The pauses in poetry are determined by the sense of the passage; that is, by what an intelligent reading of the passage requires. In a long verse, such as the hexameter, a pause occurs usually somewhere in the line as well as frequently at the end. Pauses within the verse are of two kinds: diaeresis and caesura. In the passage quoted above, the metrical pattern of dactyls and spondees does not usually agree with the syllabification of the words themselves. That is, there is an overlap in the pattern so that one word ends in the middle of a foot and the next one begins a foot as in v. 3. But occasionally a word and a foot end together as in *crimine* (v. 1), *domis ut* (v. 2), *caecumina* (v. 4), *occidit* (v. 5), *aequoris, terris mari* (a) (v. 6). The coincidence of the ending of word and foot is called diaeresis. A string of diaereses gives a jerky effect to the verse, and so a succession of them was avoided except for special effects. When the sense also requires us to stop, the diaeresis then, as in v. 6, becomes a distinct pause; it is as though everything had stopped. As in v. 5: *idem somus; occidit*, such a diaeresis is indicated by II, and is known as diaeresis-pause.

Diaeresis was generally avoided in the middle of the verse which is the weakest point. But the other pause, caesura, was frequently used here. Caesura occurs when a word ends before the metrical foot is complete. The effect is that of suspense. The ear, having been conditioned to a regular pattern of long and short syllables, hears that pattern. When it is not completed or when it is interrupted, a slight sense of anticipation is created which carries through the pause and the ending of the foot. Caesura has the tendency to bind the foot together unlike diaeresis which tends to separate the verse. To determine the caesura of the line, just as the diaeresis-pause, we have to pay attention to the sense of the passage. For example, one would not pause after *domis* or *ut* in v. 2, or after *idem* in v. 5, or even after *crimine* in v. 1, but those lines con-

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tain a caesura. Frequently the caesura occurs where there is a mark of punctuation as appears after *viser* in v. 2 or *tuis* in v. 3. Caesura, indicated by ||, is of two kinds in the hexameter. When it falls after the first long syllable, it is called masculine (—||~); after the first short, it is called feminine (—~||~). It usually occurs in the third foot, although sometimes in the second or the fourth, and sometimes in both. A line with a diaeresis-pause does not usually contain a caesura.

A pause frequently occurs at the end of a verse, especially when a mark of punctuation occurs there or when the final syllable is not a long one, as in v. 3. A verse with a pause at the end is called end-stopped and is indicated by |. When no pause falls at the end, the verse is called a run-on line, as v. 5.

In every foot of a hexameter the first syllable, which is a long one, has naturally greater emphasis than the rest of the foot. This emphasis is called the ictus, or beat of the foot. Sometimes this beat coincides with the normal accent of the word, but just as often it does not. Although it is possible to compose a verse where both stresses coincide, the cost in the hexameter is the excessive use of diaeresis. Therefore conflict arises. Sometimes the conflict is deliberately sought as Vergil frequently did in the *Aeneid*. But in general a compromise was agreed on so that, in the hexameter, coincidence of ictus and accent occurs in the last two feet and usually at the beginning of the verse.

The six lines of *Silvae* V. 4 are syllabified and scanned with diaeresis-pause (||), caesura (|), end-stop (|), ictus (//), and accent (´) indicated.

Cr-mi-ne quo me-ru-i, lu-ue-nis pla-ci-dis-si-me di-um,
 quo-ue-er-ro-re mi-ser, do-m-s-ur so-lu-s-ge-rem,
 Som-ne, tu is-ta-ce-tom-ne pe-cus-uo-lu-eres-que fe-rae-que
 et si-mu-lant fes-sos-cur-na-ta ca-cu-mi-na som-nos,
 nec tru-ci-bus flu-ur-sj-dem so-nu-s, oc-ci-di(h)or-ror
 ae-quo-ri-s, et fer-ris ma-ri-æ ad-clī-na-ta qui-es-cunt.

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After you have examined the metrics of a passage, observe what effect, if any, there is in the placing of diaeresis or caesura. In v. 1, for example, the *crimen* is set off by the diaeresis for the sake of emphasis, and the caesura of the line, though normal, emphasizes the invocation. The caesurae of v. 3 are effective. The first one occurs in the second foot where the question is emphatic, but the effect of the caesura hastens us on in a manner that a diaeresis-pause would not. The caesura in the fourth foot is slight, for there is only a slight separation intended between the beasts and the birds. The pause at the end of the verse avoids the collision of *que* and *et*. The diaeresis of v. 4 emphasizes the word *caecumina* and aids the suggestion of the peaks. *Curvata cacumina* metrically reinforces the image of the phrase. The long-delayed pause of v. 5, which is a diaeresis-pause, and the run-on line and the diaeresis of the first foot of v. 6, markedly underscore the three words, *occidit*, *horror*, *aequoris*, and their concepts, as well as prepare for the quiet close of the rest of the verse.

Certain other metrical phenomena, which it will be well to illustrate, exist in the passage. Assonance, or the repetition of the same sound or a closely similar one within or at the end of the word, occurs in the repetition of the *m*, the *o*, and the *s* sounds in vv. 1-3. The sound coupled with the sense of the passage furthers the suggestions of the question, emphasizes the softness of sleep, and the sense of puzzlement. Alliteration, another device at the disposal of the poet, is the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of a word, as in *curvata cacumina*. Alliteration there helps to reinforce the idea of those words. Rhyme, the repetition of the same sound at the end of the words, appears in *fessos . . . somnos* in v. 4. In Latin poetry of the classical period, rhyme was generally avoided except for special effects such as here where the rhyme emphasized by the caesura binds the two words together.

Such then are the metrical considerations which help shape the idea of this poem's first six verses. In discussing them we have been careful not to say that such and such creates this or that effect. The reason for the avoidance is that metrics and metrical matters cannot be divorced from the words involved. The *s* and *m* sounds of

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iuuenis placidissime diuum do not of themselves, even when combined with the long vowels, create the illusion of "softness." The same sounds in another context might help to suggest something else: fear or hatred. Words are the important elements; they carry the meaning, and their sounds when skillfully used may reinforce that meaning.

Here is the entire poem. Carefully mark the scansion and pauses in vv. 7-19, and observe the use of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. The starred verses are especially noteworthy.

Publius Papinius Statius (c.40 or 45-96 A.D.)

Silvae V.4

- Crimine quo merui, iuuenis placidissime diuum,
 quoue errore miser, donis ut solus egerem,
 Somne, tuis? tacet omne pecus uolucresque feraeque
 * et simulant fessos curvata cacumina somnos,
 5 * nec truchibus fluuiis idem sonus; occidit horror
 aequoris, et terris maria adclinata quiescunt.
 * septima iam rediens Phoebe mihi respicit aegras
 stare genas; totidem Oetaeae Paphiaequae reuisunt
 lampades et totiens nostros Tithonia questus
 10 * praeterit et gelido spargit miserata flagello.
 * unde ego sufficiam? non si mihi lumina mille
 quae sacer alterna tantum statione tenebat
 * Argus et haud unquam uigilabat corpore toto.
 * at nunc heu! si aliquis longa sub nocte puellae
 15 brachia nexa tenens ultro te, Somne, repellit,
 inde ueni nec te totas infundere pennas
 * luminibus compello meis (hoc turba precetur
 * laetior): extremo me tange cacumine uirgae,
 sufficit, aut leuiter suspenso poplite transi.

NOTES

8. *Oetaeae Paphiaequae*—i.e., the morning and evening stars. *Oetaeae* is a reference to the mountain range between Thessaly and

Aetolia where Hercules ascended the funeral pyre; *Paphiaequae* is a reference to the planet of Paphian Venus.

9. *Tithonia*—i.e., the dawn, Aurora, uses a whip to chase the stars from the heaven; from it fall the dewdrops upon the poet. Tithonus was the husband of Aurora.
 12. *sacer*—because sent by Juno.

QUESTIONS

1. What purpose does the invocation serve?
2. How are concrete details employed in the poem?

§§§

Incertus Auctor

- Heia, uiri, nostrum reboans echo sonet heia!
 arbiter effusi late maris ore sereno
 placatum strauit pelagus positique procellam,
 edomitique uago sederunt pondere fluctus.
 5 Heia, uiri, nostrum reboans echo sonet heia!
 annisu parili tremat icibus acta carina.
 nunc dabit arridens pelago concordia caeli
 uentorum motu praegnantia currere uelo.
 Heia, uiri, nostrum reboans echo sonet heia!
 10 aequora prora secet delphinis aemula saltu
 atque gemat largum, promat seseque lacertis,
 pone trahens canum deducat et orbita sulcum.
 Heia, uiri, nostrum reboans echo sonet heia!
 persulset Phorci chorus aequora: nos tamen heia.
 15 conuulsum remis spumet mare: nos tamen heia.
 nocibus adsiduis litus resonet "tamen heia."

NOTES

Meter: Dactylic Hexameter.

2. *arbiter*—i.e., Neptune.
 10. *aemula*—as a noun it usually takes a genitive.
 11. *largum*—an internal accusative.
- lacertis*—ablative of means.