

Translating Latin Verse

There are several techniques and matters to bear in mind when translating Latin verse, a handful of which are outlined below. The most important thing to remember, however, is that poetic Latin is still Latin and so the familiar and fundamental rules and approaches can be applied in much the same way as when dealing with prose. Accurately translating verse, with its fluid word order and elevated register, is above all the ultimate test of vocabulary, accidence and syntax.

What follows is by no means an exhaustive catalogue and there are plenty of other peculiarities of Latin verse which the student will meet through the passages of this book and beyond.

Vocabulary

As in English, the lexicon of Latin poetry is different to that of prose. There are many words in Ovid which simply do not occur in the widely-read prose authors: for obvious reasons, words for 'radiant' and 'nymph', stories of goddesses and rich descriptions of rural idylls do not feature commonly in Caesar or Cicero.

A list of 450 of the most common items of verse vocabulary can be found at the back of this book. But in addition to learning these words thoroughly, it is highly advisable to make a note of other unfamiliar words encountered in the passages. It need hardly be stressed that not knowing the meaning of words is the greatest obstacle to producing an elegant and accurate translation.

Word order

There are patterns in prose word order to which readers quickly become accustomed (i.e. the verb at the end, nouns with their adjectives, etc.). In verse, however, these rules of thumb no longer pertain. Words will often appear 'out of position' (from a prose point of view) and much more careful analysis will be needed to discover the order of translation. Above all, do not succumb to the temptation to translate each Latin word in the order it appears in the line, a temptation especially powerful when the meaning of a line is difficult to grasp at the first attempt.

The most common challenge is the mix of adjectives and nouns across a sentence. Here is an example:

 *tantus caelesti venit ab ore vigor.*

Such great force came from the heavenly mouth.

Fasti IV.542

In prose, this would be *tantus vigor ab ore caelesti venit* and easily translatable. But in verse, the jumbled word order necessitates care and confidence in accident to know that *tantus* and *vigor* are both nominative singular (so agree) and that *caelesti* and *ore* are both ablative singular (so agree and follow *ab*).

Often sense will help, but not always in the sometimes obscure and whimsical world of Ovid. Verse requires even better knowledge of accident than prose to guarantee getting the sense of each sentence.

Key words out of place

As part of the looser word order of verse, a special feature to get used to is the appearance of vital words which introduce new constructions or syntactical units 'out of position'; requiring special care are words

like *qui, quae, quod* (who, which) and conjunctions (*et, ut, cum*, etc.). Here is an example:

ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos.

Her. XII.34

Accustomed to translating prose, the word order here could easily lead us along the lines of 'it burned in order to ...' or 'it burned as ...'. In Latin poetry, however, it is very common for a conjunction such as *ut* to be postponed from the start of the line, even though that is where it belongs (again from a prose point of view). So this line translates, 'as a pine torch burns to the great gods'.

Beware of this: a reader fresh from prose will need to adjust his expectations regarding where conjunctions will appear.

In a similar vein, be careful when dealing with prepositions, which in prose generally come before their noun but which in verse can be moved around much more freely, so that the noun can even precede the preposition which governs it (a phenomenon known as *anastrophe*).

... nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.

I pressed the naked girl right up to my body.

(In prose: ... *usque ad corpus meum*)

Am. I.5.24

Omission (ellipsis) of verbs

One of the hardest aspects of verse translation is the poet's tendency to leave out key verbs and ask the reader to 'understand' or 'supply' them.

gratia, Musa, tibi.

Tr. IV.10.117

This verbless sentence requires the translator to add something in: here the best translation is probably 'Thanks be to you, Muse'. As this simple example indicates, an especially common ellipsis is that of the verb 'to be', which can even be left out when it is part of another verb (e.g. a perfect passive).

nescius haec umeris arma parata suis.

Not knowing that these weapons were prepared for his shoulders,

Ars Am. II.50

The infinitive *esse* is omitted (*parata esse* becomes just *parata*). As with so many of verse's peculiarities, practice and care will soon accustom the newcomer to missing verbs.

Omission (ellipsis) of prepositions

As common as omitted verbs are omitted prepositions. Poets frequently miss these little words out altogether and rely on the reader to understand them.

Scylla loco mansit . . .

Scylla stayed in the place . . .

Met. XIV.70

Here, the word *in*, which would be expected in prose, is omitted. The ablative *loco* and common sense point to the correct translation.

Plural for singular

Latin poetry often uses a plural noun when the singular is meant. The only way to tell is by the sense of the sentence – the plural will normally sound very odd in English.

flexte, precor, vultus ad mea furta tuos!

Turn, I pray, your face to my secret missions!
[lit. your faces]

Her. XVIII.64

In Ovid, this phenomenon is especially common with the first person, where *nos* (we) and *noster* (our) are regularly used to mean 'I' or 'my' respectively (a sort of 'royal we').

impia si nostros legisset Scylla libellos . . .

If wicked Scylla had read my little books . . .
[lit. our little books]

Rem. Am. 67

(Note the conjunction *si* out of place as well.)

It is also worth bearing in mind that, although it is less common, a 'singular for plural' is also found in Ovid (i.e. sometimes the poet uses a singular noun where a plural is strictly meant).

. . . et tacito pectore multa movent.

. . . and they stir many things in their silent hearts.
[lit. silent heart]

Ars Am. I.110

Lines and couplets

When first reading Latin poetry, it can be easy to view each line as a self-contained unit and the end of the line, whether punctuated or not, as a break in syntax. It is not at all necessary, however, for the end of the line to coincide with the end of the clause or sentence and the beginner must quickly disabuse himself of any assumption on this front.

In hexameter poetry, this enjambment is extremely common and the translator will quickly become accustomed to sense flowing from line into line uninterrupted.

*plura locuturum timido Peneia cursu
fugit cumque . . .*

As he was about to say more, Daphne at a frightened run
fled from him and when . . .

Met. I.525

In elegiac poetry, the couplet is almost always a complete syntactical unit. Nevertheless, care is required not to see the end of the first line (the hexameter) as a necessary break in sense, even if punctuated, and consideration of the couplet as a whole will often be needed to translate.

*victor abes, nec scire mihi, quae causa morandi,
aut in quo lateas ferreus orbe, licet.*

Though victorious you are still away, nor is it allowed for me to
know what is the cause of your delay,
or in what part of the world you are hiding, hard-hearted man.

Her. I.57

Looseness of tense

Ovid's abrupt changes of tense from the past to the 'historic' present, used to add vividness to the Latin, can be disconcerting to translate. There is certainly no need for a present tense translation in English for every present tense verb in Latin: keeping everything in the past is often preferable.

*rex populo praedae signa petita dedit.
protinus exsiliunt . . .*

The king gave the long-awaited sign to the people to grab their spoils.

They jumped up at once ...
[lit. They jump up ...].

Ars Am. I.114

Metonymy

Ancient poets use gods or goddesses to represent their attributes or areas of power: this is known as metonymy. It is therefore important to be ready to translate, for example, *Venus* or *Cupido* as 'love', if doing so improves the sense of the English. Similarly *Mars* often means 'war', *Musa* 'poetry', *Ceres* 'corn', and so on.

Tyrrhenum valido Marte per agmen eunt.

They go through the Etruscan column with powerful fighting.

Fasti II.208

Objects can be used to the same effect: so *sceptrum* (sceptre) can stand as metonymy for royal power and *torus* (marriage-bed) or *thalamus* (bed-chamber) for marriage.

In a similar manner, the natural elements are very often personified as divine beings rather than mere physical phenomena: the dawn as *Aurora*, the sun as *Sol* and, most frequently, the various winds such as *Zephyrus*, *Eurus* and *Notus*. These instances of personification need not be undone when translating (*Aurora* can remain as 'Dawn'), but they do require a little care to ensure a smooth and comprehensible translation. Note also that *Amor* is a common alternative name for Cupid.

Finally, be alert for synecdoche, where a part represents the whole. Thus *puppis* (stern) and *prora* (prow) are both used to mean 'ship', *limen* (threshold) to mean a 'house', *axis* (an axle) to mean a 'chariot', and so forth.

Register

As one would expect, there is generally a more elevated and poetical 'register' or tone in Ovid, markedly different to Caesar's accounts of his victories in battle or even the more finely-wrought passages of Cicero or Livy. Poetry's subject matter is naturally less mundane and more inclined to be fantastical, sensual and emotional.

mons ibi verticibus petit arduus astra duobus . . .

There a high mountain reaches up to the stars with twin peaks . . .

Met. I.316

Sentences of this nature, rich in descriptive detail, hyperbole and personification, are not common in prose but abound in verse. This means there is a need to familiarize oneself with stylistic figures (assonance, asyndeton, polyptoton, etc.) and to translate them idiomatically – as in the example below:

. . . deposito pariter cum veste timore . . .

. . . having laid aside my fear along with my clothes . . .

Her. XVIII.57

Here we have a fine example of Ovidian wit in the form of zeugma, which requires a confident approach to produce a good translation. In addition, noticing and analysing Ovid's deployment of such stylistic features is vital to appreciating his art and commenting on it (see chapter on *Ovid's Style*).

Deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words

In the passages of this book there will be Latin words which are not familiar, nor listed in the vocabulary checklists, nor glossed. The

meanings of such words, however, should be deducible from the context of the passages, or from English or Latin cognates.

An ability to work out some words is simply expected from linguistic general knowledge. So, knowing the meaning of *locus*, the verb *locavit* should not be difficult to translate. What part of the body is the *femur*? Or what is a sword if described as *acutum*? Or can French help in working out the meaning of *fenestra*?

It is also very important when encountering unknown vocabulary to think carefully about how Latin works. A few common facets of the language which can be helpful are given below.

Vowel weakening

First, bear in mind the phenomenon of 'vowel weakening', whereby the vowel sound in a word changes when a prefix is added. This is particularly common with the letter *-a-*, which weakens to *-i-*:

facio becomes *interficio*; *iacio* becomes *adicio*; *salio* becomes *insilio*

But it also happens with other vowels and diphthongs:

teneo becomes *retineo*; *claudio* becomes *includo*

And it occurs in prefixed adjectives as well, especially after the privative *in-*:

arma gives us *inermis*; *aptus* becomes *ineptus*

Be particularly careful when dealing with the stem *-cid-* in a compound verb, as this could be from *caedo* (I kill) or from *cado* (I fall). Therefore the same word can have essentially opposite meanings and consideration of the context will be necessary:

caedo becomes *occido* (I kill); *cado* becomes *occido* (I die)

Scansion, when learnt, can help here: the diphthong in *caedo* gives a long *i* (*occīdo*), whereas the short *a* of *cādo* gives a short *i* (*occīdo*).

Assimilation

Remember how prefixes work in compound verbs, and look out for assimilation (when the first consonant of a word can induce the final consonant of a prefix to change):

ad-cedo becomes *accedo*; *ex-fodio* becomes *effodio*

Common suffixes

Certain suffixes (endings) can be added to word roots to give a particular effect.

- The suffixes *-tor* (gen. *-toris*), *-sor* (*-soris*) or the feminine *-trix* (*-trix*) indicate agency, the person who does an action, like the English *-er* (teacher) or *-or* (benefactor):

<i>emptor</i> (<i>emo</i>)	buyer
<i>victrix</i> (<i>vinco</i>)	victor
<i>obsessor</i> (<i>obsideo</i>)	besieger

- Fourth declension nouns formed from the supine stem of a verb commonly express the activity the verb denotes:

<i>monitus</i>	warning
<i>ductus</i>	leadership

- The suffixes *-tio* (gen. *-tionis*), *-tudo* (*-tudinis*), *-tia* (*-tiae*), *-tas* (*-tatis*) all form abstract nouns:

<i>libertas</i> (<i>liber</i>)	freedom
<i>proditio</i> (<i>prodo</i>)	betrayal
<i>claritudo</i> (<i>clarus</i>)	fame

- The suffixes *-ellus*, *-ulus/-ullus* or *-olus/-ollus* indicate diminutives (little or affectionately-viewed versions of the original noun):

<i>filiolus</i> (<i>filius</i>)	(dear) little son
<i>libellus</i> (<i>liber</i>)	little book

Some final little things

There are a few other aspects to Latin verse language which are worth bearing in mind:

- The ending *-ere* can be used for the third person plural of the perfect active (i.e. instead of *-erunt*):

amavere = *amaverunt* they loved

- The ending *-ere* can also be used instead of *-eris* in the second person singular of the passive (present or future):

amabere = *amaberis* you will be loved

- The genitive plural ending of the second declension can be contracted to *-um* (instead of *-orum*):

divum = *divorum* of the gods

- The 'syncopated' form of the perfect or pluperfect tense substitutes *-arat* for *-averat* etc. (i.e. the *-ve-* or *-vi-* is omitted):

amarat = *amaverat* he had loved

amasse = *amavisse* to have loved

- The agreement of the verb with the noun in terms of number can be based on sense rather than strict grammatical accuracy (especially with collective nouns). In the example below, although the subject *turba* is singular, the verbs have plural endings (*-ant/-ent*) on the logic that the crowd is made up of many men:

tura ferant placentque novum pia turba Quirinum

Let the dutiful crowd bring incense and appease the new Quirinus.

Fasti II.507

- Two common uses of the accusative case:

- (i) the 'accusative of respect', where a noun is placed in the accusative to indicate the part (often a body part) affected by the action of the verb:

caput niveo velatus amictu

Having veiled his head with a white hood
(*lit.* Veiled with respect to his head ...).

Fasti III.363

- (ii) the 'exclamatory accusative', where a noun or phrase in the accusative forms an exclamation:

me miserum!

Wretched me!

Ovid's Style

The below does not aspire to be a handbook for the stylistic analysis of Ovid nor to comprise an exhaustive catalogue of his techniques. It is merely intended to point out some elements which the newcomer to Ovid may like to consider both as he reads Ovid's poetry and as he is asked to examine how the poet achieves certain effects.

Several of the books listed on pp.14-15 feature chapters on the style of Ovid. The surest understanding of Ovid's art, however, will come from reading his works as widely and as carefully as possible. Try not to view the passages in this book as chunks of impenetrable Latin to be doggedly translated; rather strive, especially as confidence with the language grows, to notice some of the devices detailed below, and above all to ask how they contribute to the poem's meaning and power in their particular contexts.

Syntax

Anacoluthon

The breaking off of the sentence structure to create the '...' effect of unfinished syntax. This is often used to represent extremes of passion, where the speaker's distraction in the heat of anger, love, etc. leaves his sentence to peter out.

*invida vestis eras, quae tam bona crura tegebas;
quoque magis spectes = invida vestis eras.*

You were a jealous dress, who covered such fine legs;
the more one looks at, oh you were a jealous dress!

Am. III.2.27

In his lustful reveries about the legs beneath his girl's dress, the anacoluthon suggests the speaker has lost his train of thought entirely.

Anaphora

The repetition of the same word (or phrase), generally at the start of successive clauses. The effect is a rhetorical one, often adding insistence or emphasis by the hammering repetition of a particular detail.

te maestae volucres, Orpheu, te turba ferarum,
te rigidi silices, te carmina saepe secutae
fleverunt silvae . . .

For you, Orpheus, wept the sad birds, for you the throng of beasts,
for you the hard flints, for you the woods who had often followed
your songs . . .

Met. XI.44

The repeated *te* before each new subject underlines the single focus of all of nature's grief on 'you' (i.e. Orpheus). Anaphora is often (as here) combined with asyndeton (on which see below).

Apostrophe

The 'turning away' of the narrator or speaker from his narrative to address a character, an object or the reader.

at te, Nesse ferox, eiusdem virginis ardor
perdiderat volucris traiectionem terga sagitta.

But you, fierce Nessus, had passion for the same
maiden destroyed, pierced through the back by a winged arrow.

Met. IX.101

In this example, the fate of Nessus is made more dramatic and immediate by the narrator's direct address of the centaur just before he describes how he met his end. But apostrophe can have other effects: it can arouse pity, as is the case above with the apostrophe of Orpheus from *Met. XI*, while in the example from *Am. III* its impact is comic as Ovid lecherously apostrophizes a dress.

Asyndeton

The omission of conjunctions. Again, the effects of asyndeton are manifold, but often it can add rhetorical power to a list (it is often combined with anaphora – see the example from *Met. XI* above) or generate speed in a string of clauses.

*tum bis ad occasus, bis se convertit ad ortus,
ter iuvenem baculo tetigit, tria carmina dixit.*

The she turned herself twice to the west, twice to the east,
thrice she touched the youth with her wand, she spoke three spells.

Met. XIV.386

Here the asyndeton helps to recreate the witch Circe's formulaic incantations, following one after the other in ritual succession.

Hendiadys

The expression of one complex idea as though two separate ones. This commonly serves to magnify or to emphasize.

quid tibi de turba narrem numeroque virorum?

What can I tell you about the huge crowd of men?
[lit. the crowd and the number of men]

Her. XVI.183

The separation of the idea of a 'big crowd' into two elements, 'crowd' and 'number', exaggerates the size of the throng.

Hypallage

The use of an adjective to describe a noun with which it does not properly belong (also known as 'transferred epithet').

*ecce boves illuc Erytheidas adplicat heros
emensus longi claviger orbis iter.*

Look! The club-bearing hero drives the Erythean
oxen here, travelling a long journey through the world.
[lit. a journey through the long world]

Fasti I.543

By the transferring of the adjective *longi* from *iter* to *orbis*, the Latin seems to emphasize the world-spanning length of Hercules' trek.

Litotes

Double negation, producing understatement for effect.

*qua venata foret silva, narrare parantem
impedit amplexu nec se sine crimine prodit.*

As she prepared to tell which woods she hunted in,
he stopped her by his embrace and betrayed himself in all his
villainy.

[lit. not without a crime]

Met. II.432

Jupiter's abject criminality as he rapes Callisto is stressed by the deliberately inadequate double negative *nec . . . sine crimine*.

Paronomasia

A pun or play on words with similar sounds.

*illa sonat raucum quiddam atque inamabile ridet,
ut rudit a scabra turpis asella mola.*

That girl makes a harsh sound and she laughs horribly,
as a mangy ass brays by a rough mill-stone.

Ars Am. III.289

The play on the similar-sounding verbs *ridet* (laughs) and *rudit* (brays) makes humorously indistinguishable the laughter of the girl and the bestial grunting of a donkey.

Polyptoton

The repetition of different inflections of the same word.

*flagrant sancti sceleratis ignibus ignes,
mixtaque erat flammae flamma profana piae.*

The sacred fires were burning with accursed fires,
and unholy flame had been mixed with pious flame.

Fasti VI.439

The strangeness of the scene as the fires of Rome's sacred hearth in the temple of Vesta are 'burnt' in a fire (i.e. the temple itself is burning down), as well as the profusion of flames in this roaring inferno, is conveyed by the double polyptoton.

Polysyndeton

The exaggerated use of conjunctions (contrast to asyndeton). Its effect is primarily to magnify a list, often of places or people but also of actions or events.

*iam Samos a laeva (fuerant Naxosque relictæ
 et Paros et Clario Delos amata deo)
 dextra Lebinthos erat silvisque umbrosa Calymne
 cinctaque piscosis Astypalaea vadis . . .*

Now Samos was on their left (Naxos and Paros and Delos
 loved by the Clarian god had been left behind)
 Lebinthos was on their right and Calymne shaded with woods
 and Astypalaea surrounded with fish-filled shallows . . .

Ars Am. II.79

The repeated *et* and *-que* exaggerate the catalogue of islands dotting the sea far below Daedalus and Icarus as they soar along above them.

Proper nouns and antonomasia

Throughout the *Metamorphoses* especially, the reader will note the number of times that a character's name is not used. Instead, Ovid conjures an epic atmosphere with antonomasia (using a different appellation), including geographical epithets (e.g. *Delius* for Apollo), patronymics (e.g. *Pelides* for Achilles – look out for the *-ides* suffix) and simply roles or titles (e.g. *rector maris* for Neptune). Often, however, more is at play than mere 'epicizing', and particular names are used at significant moments.

*neque enim Iove nata recusat
 nec monet ulterius nec iam certamina differt.*

Nor did the daughter of Jupiter refuse,
 nor make further warnings nor delay the contest.

Met. VI.51

Ovid's description of Athene by the epic antonomasia *Iove nata* at this moment underlines Arachne's audacity as she fearlessly challenges so great a goddess to a weaving contest. And as ever in Ovid, there is often a sense of parody in his use of such epic devices.

*et notos mores non satis urbis habet
in qua Martigenae non sunt sine crimine nati
Romulus Iliades Iliadesque Remus.*

And he does not know well enough this city's customs,
in which the sons of Mars were born with no little scandal,
Romulus the son of Ilia and the son of Ilia Remus.

Am. III.4.38

Here Ovid's rather outrageous contention is that adultery is authentically Roman, sanctioned and sanctified by the ancient myths of the city's foundation. The very epic compound adjective *Martigenae* and the repeated patronymic *Iliades* give a humorous grandeur as Ovid teases his serious forebears who had epicized Rome's glorious rise (and, more daringly, his contemporaries who were trying to re-energize these myths). Note the litotes here too, of course, in *non . . . sine crimine nati*.

Finally, remember how proper nouns can be used in metonymy or personification to add a poetic grandeur, sincere or tongue-in-cheek, to simple objects or abstractions (see earlier section for details).

Tricolon

A succession of three parallel words or clauses. The last is often the longest or most powerful: this is known as a tricolon crescens or crescendo. It is often combined with asyndeton and/or anaphora, as in the example below:

*non incola montis,
non ego sum pastor, non hic armenta gregesque
horridus observo.*

I am not a mountain dweller,
nor a shepherd, nor am I some unkempt fellow watching over
the herds and flocks here.

Met. I.512

The tricolon crescens in this example adds rhetorical power as the god Apollo makes very clear to Daphne that he is far from being some common-or-garden local peasant.

Zeugma (or syllepsis)

Usually in Ovid, the use of one verb with two subjects or objects of differing natures (generally one literal, the other metaphorical). Its effect is a witty linking of the two, often to convey the combined physical and mental impact of a single event.

*et mens et quod opus fabrilis dextra tenebat
excidit:*

Both his sense and the work his craftsman's hand was holding
fell away . . .

Met. IV.175

So here, as he sees Venus and Mars *in flagrante delicto*, Vulcan's mental faculties metaphorically 'drop away' and at the same time the iron he is forging literally drops from his hand: in other words, the zeugma pithily describes how he reeled utterly, body and soul, at what he saw.

Word order

Chiasmus

The ordering of words or phrases in an 'A-B-B-A' arrangement. Chiasmus' effects are legion, though it often enacts a sense of contrast or balance.

A B B A

ventus erat nautis aptus, non aptus amanti.

The wind was well-suited to sailors, not well-suited to a lover.

Her. XIII.11

The chiastic arrangement above emphasizes the antithesis: the wind is perfect for the sailors in their eagerness to set sail, but hateful to Laodamia, as it will bear her husband's ship from her. Although this particular use of chiasmus, to stress a contrast, is a common one, chiastic arrangement can achieve other effects too:

A B C C B A

candida me capiet, capiet me flava puella.

A pale-skinned girl will captivate me, a blond will captivate me.

Am. II.4.39

In this instance the chiasmus, combined with the repeated *capiet* and *me*, underlines how catholic is Ovid's taste in girls.

Epanalepsis

The resumptive repetition of a word or phrase after intervening words, often on the next line of verse.

nec tibi, quae reditus monstrarent, fila dedissem,

fila per adductas saepe recepta manus.

I wish I had not given you the thread to show you the route back,
thread often taken up again and passed through the hands it led.

Her. X.103

The epanalepsis helps to generate a plangent tone in Ariadne's words as she proclaims her regret at having given the thread, the very thread (stressed by its repetition) which had saved Theseus' life in the Labyrinth. Although, as several scholars note, epanalepsis is comparatively rare in Ovid, it does feature in several of the passages of this book and in his works more widely, generally with the effect of adding emphasis or emotional weight to the repeated word or phrase.

Hyperbaton

The disruption of normal word order to engineer a separation of words which syntactically belong together.

*et pavidum blandita 'fer has, fidissime, nostro—'
dixit, et adiecit longo post tempore 'fratri.'*

And said in fearfully coaxing tones, 'Take this, most trusty servant, to my ...', and she added after a long pause '... brother'.

Met. IX.569

In this famous and remarkable example of hyperbaton, Byblis' embarrassment and fear in revealing that the recipient of her ardent love-letter is to be her own brother is beautifully conveyed by the hyperbaton of *nostro ... fratri* (my ... brother). It is especially effective, as Anderson notes, because *nostro* on its own could mean 'my darling': we have to wait an excruciating line for Byblis to spell out the real addressee of her letter with *fratri*.¹ This delay of a dramatic detail is one of the many effects Ovid achieves by hyperbaton. Another is the suggestion of length or labour as the separation of words draws out the phrase; or simply heavy emphasis, as in this example which sees Iphis berating herself for her unnatural but inescapable love:

*meus est furiosior illo,
si verum profitemur, amor.*

My love is more crazed than hers,
if truth be told.

Met. IX.737

¹ Anderson, W. S. (1972) *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Books 6-10*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, pp.457-8.

Iconic word order

The arrangement of words in such an order that they mimic or depict their meaning, so that syntax imitates sense. This is also known as 'pictorial' or 'mimetic' word order.

saepe, ubi constiterant hinc Thisbe, | Pyramus illinc . . .

Often, when on this side had stood Thisbe, Pyramus on that . . .

Met. IV.71

The chiastic word order here is iconic, in that the words draw out the picture of Pyramus and Thisbe either side of the thin party-wall, pressed against it and listening to each other's amorous whispers. A very common species of iconic word order is the enclosing of one phrase within another to enact a sense of surrounding, as in the example below, where the mountain summits are beset on all sides by the surging waters of Jupiter's flood:

pulsabantque novi montana cacumina fluctus.

And the new waves were pounding mountain tops.

Met. I.310

Juxtaposition

The collocation of words for effect (usually contrast).

gratia sic minimo magna labore venit.

Thus great favour comes from very little effort.

Am. III.4.46

The juxtaposed opposites *minimo* and *magna* emphasize the antithesis Ovid is drawing here between the minimal work a liberal-minded husband needs to put in and the immense rewards

he can expect to win. This juxtaposition of clashing or antipodal words is a common device to stress contrast, conflict or sudden change.

Metre and rhythm

To reduce Ovid's use of metre to simplistic axioms such as 'dactyls = speed' represents, of course, an utterly inadequate account of the metrical nuances of a genius. Nevertheless, here are some things to consider in analysing the rhythm of lines of Ovid – a vital and often-overlooked area to examine when considering the stylistic effectiveness of a passage. (See *An Introduction to Scansion and Ovid's Metres* for how to scan.)

Dactyls

Dactylic rhythms add pace and momentum to the verse, conveying speed with their 'tripping' or 'galloping' pulse. Here, Actaeon's hounds begin a tearing chase of their one-time master:

— ◡ ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — — — — — ◡ — ×
inde ruunt alii rapida velocius aura

Then charged the rest, swifter than a howling wind ...

Met. III.209

They can evoke excitement or panic, like a racing heartbeat, as below of Phaethon's terror as his chariot hurtles towards the ground:

— ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — — — — — ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — ×
palluit et subito genu(a) intremuere timore.

He turned pale and his knees trembled with a sudden fear.

Met. II.180

and similarly distress and emotional turmoil, such as Attis' here:

et modo 'tolle faces', 'remove' modo 'verbera' clamat.

And she shouted at one moment, 'Take away the torches!', at another 'Remove the whips!'

Fasti IV.235

Finally, dactyls can give a feeling of lightness to the verse as well as speed – indeed it is worth noting that, in general, Ovid's hexameters are significantly more dactylic than (for example) Virgil's. Below, perhaps, there is a lightness as Ovid recalls his embarrassing impotence – and perhaps too there is a suggestion of sexual excitement in the dactyls which is humorously incongruous with the stubborn failure of his apparatus to perform:

tacta tamen veluti gelida mea membra cicuta

segnia propositum destituere meum;

But my member, as though touched by cold hemlock,
sluggishly resisted my efforts.

Am. III.7.13

Enjambment

The run-on of sense from one line of poetry into another, so the sense of the one line is completed by a word or phrase at the start of the next. Enjambment is generally rarer in Ovid's hexameters than in Virgil's and line-breaks in the former more frequently coincide with breaks in syntax, but this point should not be overstated, and plenty of examples of enjambment will present themselves to the reader of Ovid. The enjambed word is given great weight:

*qui, quoniam prohibent anni bellare, loquendo
pugnat et incessit scelerataque devovet arma.*

Since his age prevented him from doing battle, by his words
he fought, and advanced and cursed their guilty weapons.

Met. V.101

So here Emathion's determination to fight despite his age is underlined by the enjambment of *pugnat*. This run-on of the verb can, with verbs such as 'fall', 'leap down', 'strike', etc., enact the sense as the verb itself 'drops' into the next line:

*tum vero praeceps curru fremebundus ab alto
desilit et . . .*

Then indeed with a roar from his high chariot headlong
he leapt down, and . . .

Met. XII.128

Note that the enjambed verb, especially in moments of dramatic action such as this, is often a dactyl – a particular favourite of Virgil as well. But it is not always verbs which are emphasized in this way. In the example below, the power of Alcyone's hysterical, grief-stricken cries, which prevent her even speaking, is conveyed by the enjambment and delay of the noun *plangor*, the subject:

*plura dolor prohibet, verboque intervenit omni
plangor, et attonito gemitus a corde trahuntur.*

Grief stopped her saying more, and interrupting every word was
wailing, and groans rose up from her stricken heart.

Met. XI.708

Enjambment in elegiac couplets, where each line generally and each couplet almost invariably forms a self-contained syntactical unit, is much rarer. Nevertheless, allowing a word to run over the end of the line can lend it significant emphasis, as in the example below where

Ovid dwells on the great good fortune of a lover who can stir jealousy in his girl:

o quater et quotiens numero comprehendere non est
felicem, de quo laesa puella dolet.

Four times, so many times that cannot be counted, is he lucky over whom a wounded girl grieves!

Ars Am. II.447

Spondees

In contrast to the light, swift rhythm of dactyls, spondees are slower, weightier and more solemn: the name itself derives from the Greek σπονδαί (*spondai*), offerings to the gods. In the example below, Ovid reflects the ritual gravitas of the flute-players' roles in Rome in days gone by with the stately spondees:

cantabat fanis, cantabat tibia ludis,

cantabat maestis tibia funeribus.

The flute played at shrines, the flute played at the games,
the flute played at sorrowful funerals.

Fasti VI.659

Naturally, slow spondaic rhythms are commonly employed to evoke slumber:

no⁻x⁻ erat, et som⁻nus⁻ lassos⁻ sub⁻misit⁻ ocellos⁻.

It was night, and sleep weighed down my weary eyes.

Am. III.5.1

And of course, in contrast to the effortless pace of dactyls, spondees convey slowness and struggle, as this example shows: first the quick dactyl for the goose's nimble flutter out of the reach of Baucis and

Philemon; and then the plodding, spondaic rhythm which dominates the line as the poor old couple strive in vain to catch up with their intended dinner:

— ∪ ∪ — — — — — — — ∪ ∪ — ×
ille celer penna tardos aetate fatigat.

The goose, swift with its feathers, wears out the couple made slow by their age.

Met. VIII.686

The slowness of spondees can introduce other ideas too. As Ovid replies to the charge that he should be concerning himself with more serious matters than love elegy, he uses lumbering spondees to convey his boredom at the very thought of the traditional careers:

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — ×
nec me verbosas leges ediscere nec me
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — ×
ingrato vocem prostituisse foro?

... that I do not learn by heart wordy laws, nor
 prostitute my voice in the unwelcome forum?

Am. I.15.5

Sound effects

Ovid makes rich and varied use of sound effects in his poetry – never forget that his poems would have been recited as well as read, and so the sound of his words is a vital consideration in analysis of his artistry. Sometimes the sound is onomatopoeic (it mimics the sound being described), as in this famous description of frogs in a pond:

quamvis sint sub aqua, sub aqua maledicere temptant.

Although they are underwater, underwater they try to shout abuse.

Met. VI.376

The consonance of *-qu-* here, in each instance occurring in the stressed syllable at the start of a metrical foot, echoes the guttural croak of the newly-transformed frogs. Or:

candidior nivibus, tunc cum cecidere recentes . . .

Whiter than snow, then when it has recently fallen . . .

Am. III.5.11

with the alliteration of *-c-* evoking the crunch of crisp, new-fallen snow. But such effects are not always mimetic:

. . . et postes extrema cuspide pulsat.

concussae patuere fores. | videt intus edentem

vipereas carnes, vitiorum alimenta suorum,

Invidiam visaque oculos avertit.

. . . and she beat the doors with the head of her spear.

As they were struck the doors opened. Inside she saw Envy,

eating the flesh of serpents, nourishment for her evils,

and she turned away her eyes as she beheld this sight.

Met. II.767

In the first two lines of this passage, the consonance of *c*, *s* and *p* does indeed make the words resound with the crash of Athene's spear, sending the doors of Envy's house flying open. But the *v-/vi-*alliteration in the second half could not be said to be recreating a particular sound. Rather, it seems perhaps to evoke a more intangibly ugly and eerie atmosphere. It also ties the various qualities described to *Invidia* (especially her foul meal of snake meat – *vipereas* – and her wickedness – *vitiorum*): this use of alliteration to link words is a common Ovidian technique to look out for. This passage might therefore give a broader picture of some of the ways in which Ovid uses the sound of his words beyond mere mimesis.

It is worth also considering the particular effects of certain sounds. The example above shows the power of plosive consonants (especially

p and *b*) for striking, pounding or the beat of horses' hooves. The repeated *s*-sound (sibilance) seems to have been inherently unpleasant to ancient ears, and so, as well as echoing snakes' hissing and running water, it can evoke misery, discomfort or ugliness. In the example below, Ovid remembers with evident pain his last night in Rome before departing into exile:

cum subito illius tristissima noctis imago . . .

When the most sorrowful picture of that night comes to my mind . . .

Tr. 1.3.1

Conversely, a pleasant, sensual or languid effect can often be achieved by liquids (*l* and *r*). In the example below, Mercury sends Argus to sleep:

languida permulcens medicata lumina virga.

Stroking his drowsy eyes with his sleep-inducing wand.

Met. 1.716

The soporific *l*-consonance here, combined with the gentle murmur of *m*, can lull even Argus' one hundred watchful eyes to sleep.

Final note

The examples used above have been deliberately selected from all over Ovid's works to demonstrate as clearly as possible the devices the poet uses. This has inevitably meant that these selections are out of context and that other elements of the Latin have been left unmentioned to focus squarely on the single stylistic feature in question in each example.

A flavour of the context has been given for each quotation here because it is all-important: without understanding what is happening,

what Ovid or his characters are saying, noting stylistic effects is a futile exercise. Any appreciation of the style of a passage must be a synthesis of device and effect – not just what is interesting about the Latin but what this achieves and why.

So as confidence begins to grow, the reader must try not only to spot such effects as those outlined above but also to consider what they contribute to Ovid's meaning, being as specific as possible to the context.