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Roman poetry/metre

Intensive Latin 2

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Basics of Latin verse

- Rhythm in Latin metre is different from normal word stress
- It is based instead on the difference between heavy and light syllables (long and short)
- Each word (form of word) has its own set quantities in this regard: we have already seen this influence pronunciation:
 - *habére* versus *dícere*: a heavy (long) antepenultimt syllable pulls the word accent towards the end of the word
- This is what determines how any word can be fitted into a metrical pattern

Hexameter

Epic poetry = written in hexameter (e.g. *Aeneid*). The hexameter line consists of six verse feet (hence the name)

- The first five feet consist of either:
 - One long + two short syllables, i.e. a **dactyl**: usually printed as
 – ˘ ˘
 - One long + one long, i.e. a **spondee**: usually printed as
 – –
- The sixth foot (final) consists of either two long syllables, or one long and one short syllable (*anceps*, “doubtful”)
 - – or – ˘

$$- \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup} / - \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup} / - \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup} / - \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup} / - \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup} / - \frac{\cup \cup}{\cup \cup}$$

The hexameter line & pauses

- This rhythm is broken up by word breaks (*caesurae*) that 'split' verse feet to help avoid coincidence between word stress and metrical emphasis
- The caesura is a tendency for a strong word-break to occur in a fixed position within a particular foot in a verse. In the hexameter, a word-break frequently occurs between the first syllable (a long syllable) of the **third foot** and the following syllable (long or short). The most clearly felt typical *caesurae* in Vergil are:
 - 3rd foot after the first long
 - 2nd foot after the first long + 4th foot after the first long
- Caesurae help structure the line, supporting the syntax and bringing out content emphasis
- ...and at Vergil's time, the fifth foot is always dactylic!

Basic rules for quantity

- Ablative singular endings (1st-2nd) are always long
- Accusative plural endings are always long
 - even though other endings whose final letter is not *s* are short: mensam
- Diphthongs (*ae*) are always long
- Monosyllabic words with *e* are long: *e*, *de*, *me*, *te*, *se*, *ne*
- A vowel before another vowel is always short

Basics of Latin verse: words in context II

- Vowels clashing at the beginning and end of words lead to elision of the first vowel
 - *sentio et excrucior* (Cat. 85.2); *saepta armis* (Aen. 1.504)
 - This also applies to words beginning with h
- Certain ‘soft’ endings are also elided:
 - *-um* endings where a vowel follows

Basics of Latin verse: words in context I

- Length by position:
 - if a vowel is followed by two consonants it is normally long
 - exceptions for certain consonant combinations:
 - *muta* (b, p, d, t, g, c, f) *cum liquida* (m, n, l, r) (especially within one word) may remain short
 - in verse, this applies even if the consonants belong to different words:
 - monere: the highlighted e is heavy in its own right
 - uisum duxerat: the u becomes heavy through its position

Aen. 3.1-4.

Postquam res Asiae Priamique euertere gentem
immeritam uisum superis, ceciditque superbum
Ilium et omnis humo fumat Neptunia Troia,
diuersa exsilia et desertas quaerere terras

Póstquām rēs | Āsīæ | Priāmíque_ēuértērē gēntem

ímmēritām | uīsúm | sŭpērís, | cēcídítquē sŭpérbum

Ílĭum_ēt ōmnīs hŭmó | fŭmát | Nēptŭnĭă Tróia,

dīvērsa_ēxsīlĭa_ēt | dēsértās | quæērērē tērras

Next week = Ovid's *Amores*

Written in elegiac couplets: a dactylic hexameter followed by a dactylic pentameter.

— ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡
— ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — || — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡

The first two feet of the pentameter admit spondees (two long).

The form was felt by the ancients to contrast the rising (almost epic) action of the first verse with a falling quality in the second. The sentiment is summarized in an elegiac couplet from Ovid's *Amores* (1.1.27-28):

sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat:
ferrea cum vestris bella valete modis!

Hexameter: Let my work rise in six steps, fall back in five

Pentameter: Ye iron wars, with your measures, fare ye well!

Fantastic lectures on metre:

<https://antigonejournal.com/2021/05/introduction-greek-latin-metre/>

Following the above link, you can find a series of ten lectures on Greek and Latin metre delivered to students at the University of Cambridge. Intended intended for those who can read Greek and/or Latin poetry but who are curious about the full range of metres used by ancient authors.

For you, **lecture 4** is the most relevant.

For an **excellent** introductory piece:

<https://antigonejournal.com/2021/05/long-short-latin-poetry/>