

Intensive Latin 2

Week 9: Introduction to Latin Poetry

Key Dates

- We have **three more seminars** this term, Monday 31 March, 28 April, and 5 May, 1230. Please be aware that the UK is now in BST, ie the clocks have gone forward one hour since we last met.
- The next **summative assessment** is a poetry commentary, on which all information will be available this week, week 9. This will be due Sunday 11 May.
- The **final exam** will be held on Monday 19 May and will be open 0900-2359 BST. There will be more information nearer the time, but all the material from the course will be covered.

Aims

- Introduce the considerations for **translating poetry**
- Outline the process for **writing a commentary**
- Confirm the details for the **commentary assessment**
- Make suggestions for **resources** for the commentary assessment
- Practise translating poetry using an extract from Ovid
Metamorphoses III

Translating Latin Poetry

- the first challenge with Latin poetry is the **word order**: parsing the sentences will be vital for getting the correct meaning
- the **line breaks** can be off-putting: remember you still need to divide the text into syntactical units, regardless of where the lines end
- words are more likely to be omitted in poetry, especially the verb 'to be' or words that can be understood from earlier in the poem; this is known as **ellipsis**
- the **style** of the poetics is just as important as the meaning, but may be hard to replicate in translation
- Latin poetry is based in **metre**, not rhyme: we will focus on **hexameter** and **elegiac couplets**

Features of Poetic Style

- we will shortly look at an example of poetry and its style
- you can find more information about the features to look out for by reading:
 - *Reading Latin Grammar and Exercises* pp270-272
 - the extract provided from Matthew Owen's *Ovid Unseens*
 - the Latin Library's [Rhetorical Devices sheet](#)
- when you're first starting to read Latin poetry, you could use the extracts in *Reading Latin Text and Vocabulary*, or a verse reader such as [Owen](#), [Hyde](#), or [Kennedy/Davis](#)

The nymph Echo has been cursed by Juno to be able only to repeat the last few words she hears, and so she is unable to express her great love for the handsome young Narcissus, who rejects her desperate advances brutally. (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.379-92)

*How often Echo yearned to speak to Narcissus and profess
her love! But Juno's curse meant she could not speak first.*

forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido
dixerat: 'ecquis adest?' et 'adest' responderat Echo.
hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnes,
voce 'veni!' magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.
respicit et rursus nullo veniente 'quid' inquit
'me fugis?' et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.
perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis
'huc coeamus' ait, nullique libentius umquam
responsura sono 'coeamus' rettulit Echo
et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva
ibat, ut iniceret sperato brachia collo;
ille fugit fugiensque 'manus complexibus aufer!
ante' ait 'emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri';
rettulit illa nihil nisi 'sit tibi copia nostri!'

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seductus, -a, -um
ecquis . . .?
Echo (Gk decl.) (f.)
acies, -ei (f.)
totidem, quot . . .
speratus, -a, -um
collum, -i (n.)
complexus, -us (m.)
copia, -ae (f.) (+ gen.)

separated
is anyone . . .?
Echo
(here) gaze
as many as . . .
longed-for
neck
embrace
(here) opportunity to enjoy

Using a Loeb parallel text

- sub Iove saepe suo nymphas in monte iacentis,
illa deam longo prudens sermone tenebat,
dum fugerent nymphae. postquam hoc Saturnia
365 sensit,
“huius” ait “linguae, qua sum delusa, potestas
parva tibi dabitur vocisque brevissimus usus,”
reque minas firmat. tantum haec in fine loquendi
ingeminat voces auditaque verba reportat.
370 ergo ubi Narcissum per devia rura vagantem
vidit et incaluit, sequitur vestigia furtim,
quoque magis sequitur, flamma propiore calescit,
non aliter quam cum summis circumlita taedis
admotas rapiunt vivacia sulphura flammās.
375 o quotiens voluit blandis accedere dictis
et mollis adhibere preces! natura repugnat
nec sinit, incipiat, sed, quod sinit, illa parata est
expectare sonos, ad quos sua verba remittat.
forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido
dixerat: “ecquis adest?” et “adest” responderat
380 Echo.
hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnis,
voce “veni!” magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.
respicit et rursus nullo veniente “quid” inquit
“me fugis?” et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.
385 perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis
“huc coeamus” ait, nullique libentius umquam
responsura sono “coeamus” rettulit Echo
et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva
ibat, ut iniceret sperato brachia collo;
390 ille fugit fugiensque “manus complexibus aufer!
ante” ait “emoriā, quam sit tibi copia nostri”;

surprised the nymphs in company with her lord upon the mountain-sides, Echo would cunningly hold the goddess in long talk until the nymphs were fled. When Saturnia realized this, she said to her: “That tongue of thine, by which I have been tricked, shall have its power curtailed and enjoy the briefest use of speech.” The event confirmed her threat. She merely repeats the concluding phrases of a speech and returns the words she hears. Now when she saw Narcissus wandering through the fields, she was inflamed with love and followed him by stealth; and the more she followed, the more she burned by a nearer flame; as when quick-burning sulphur, smeared round the tops of torches, catches fire from another fire brought near. Oh, how often does she long to approach him with alluring words and make soft prayers to him! But her nature forbids this, nor does it permit her to begin; but as it allows, she is ready to await the sounds to which she may give back her own words. By chance the boy, separated from his faithful companions, had cried: “Is anyone here?” and “Here!” cried Echo back. Amazed, he looks around in all directions and with loud voice cries “Come!”; and “Come!” she calls him calling. He looks behind him and, seeing no one coming, calls again: “Why do you run from me?” and hears in answer his own words again. He stands still, deceived by the answering voice, and “Here let us meet,” he cries. Echo, never to answer other sound more gladly, cries: “Let us meet”; and to help her own words she comes forth from the woods that she may throw her arms around the neck she longs to clasp. But he flees at her approach and, fleeing, says: “Hands off! embrace me not! May I die before I give you power o’er

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METAMORPHOSES III

379 *forte*: 'as luck would have it'. * *seductus*: middle, 'having got himself separated'. Narcissus' situation parallels Actaeon's (174 ff.). Isolation is dangerous; there is safety in numbers. The classic case was that of Hylas, the beautiful boy who went off on his own to fetch water for the Argonauts and was dragged into the pool by its amorous nymphs (Apollonius, *Argonautica* 1.120 ff., Theocritus, *Idylls* 13, Propertius 1.20).

381 *aciem dimittit*: 'gazes about him'; *acies* (strictly 'keenness of sight') is found in poetry as a synonym of *oculi* from Lucretius on.

382 *vocat illa vocantem*: 'she calls to her caller'. The echoic repetition of similar parts of the same verb, in combination with the related noun (*voce*), suits the sound of the line to the sense. Elsewhere Echo's replies are quoted, not mimicked.

385 *alternae deceptus imagine vocis*: 'duped by the echo of the answering voice'. The gen. is appositional (GL 361, K 248, W 72.1.5), i.e. the echo consists of the answering voice.

387 *responsura*: best rendered by a relative clause, 'who would never more gladly reply to any words'. * '*coeamus*' *rettulit*: in the eager Echo's mouth *coire* has the same sense as at 324. All Narcissus meant was 'Let's meet'. *rettulit* = *reddidit*.

388 *verbis favet*: lit. 'she promotes her words', i.e. suits her action to them (by running to embrace Narcissus). Others interpret *favet* as *gaudet*, 'she delights in what she has said', but this seems pointless.

391 *emoriar*: fut., expressing defiance (an optative (wish) subj. would require *utinam* with it). * *ante ... quam*: like *postquam* and *priusquam*, *antequam* is often split between the principal and subordinate clauses (GL 574 r.1, W 216). The subj. *sit* is final in type, denoting intention (i.e. 'so that you may not have me') (GL 577, K 432, W 227 and see on 365 above). * *copia nostri*: lit. 'opportunity' or 'chance of me', so 'enjoyment of me'.

Commentary extracts for Ovid *Met* 3.379-92 [Henderson 1979]

It is partly true that Echo responds with “her own words,” in that, though she only repeats what another has said (and only the final part of the speech), she impresses on them a special meaning.

379–82 Separated from his companions, Narcissus might be vulnerable to attack, as Actaeon proved to be. Ovid starts off this episode with pluperfect in the first two lines, then moves into the present as he focuses on Narcissus’ puzzlement over the echo. His question in 380 arises from a desire to locate his friends. In the chiasitic ordering of the line, Ovid appropriately juxtaposes the hunter’s query and the shortened form of Echo’s repetition, which constitutes a reply. We can easily imagine how she converts the neutral question into her own feeling response. We are not to consider a multiple echo reverberating from many points in the landscape, but a single clear “response,” from nearby, to judge from what Ovid said about the close pursuit by Echo. Narcissus, then, imagines that the echo is the free communication of an independent person (as he will later misinterpret the reflection in the pool to be the free response of a separate individual). *vocat illa vocantem* 382: instead of mechanically reproducing the exact words of each echo, the poet devises various clever methods of alluding to them. Here, he does not repeat *veni*, but conveys the special intention of Echo: whereas Narcissus looks for someone indefinite to tell him where his path lies, she specifically calls Narcissus for love.

383–84 *nullo veniente*: ablative absolute. *quid . . . me fugis?*: because nobody appears after his previous command, Narcissus impatiently assumes that the speaker avoids him and asks why. With the very same words, again indirectly conveyed to us in 384, Echo speaks out her longing passion. When later confronted with his reflection, to which he mistakenly assigns personality, Narcissus will speak much the same words, but with a hopeless longing similar to Echo’s here (cf. 455–56 and 477–78).

Commentary extracts for Ovid *Met* 3.379-92 [Anderson 1997]

385–89 *alternae . . . imagine vocis*: a circumlocution for the echo-effect, but Ovid so phrases it as to suggest by the visual term *imago* a connection between an echo and a reflection. That helps to link the two phrases of Narcissus’ story. *coeamus* 386: Ovid exploits the difference between “getting together,” merely to make a casual acquaintance, and uniting in sexual intercourse (cf. above 324). The first person plural liberates Echo to act optimistically on her response. *verbis favet ipsa suis* 388: in “favoring her own words,” Echo happily acts upon them. *silva*: ablative of place from which. In the later story of Procris, when she lovingly moves through the underbrush in the woods to embrace Cephalus, he mistakes the sound for that of a wild animal and kills her. So Ovid recounts it in *Ars Am.* 3.731 ff. *iniceret sperato bracchia collo* 389: these words have an unmistakably erotic meaning and indicate the intention of Echo. However, in the only previous use of

inicere bracchia + dative, Ovid was describing the hostile attack in 1.184 of the monstrous children of Earth on Olympus. Thus, what Echo means as a loving approach could be construed by a cold egoist like Narcissus as disgusting belligerence, an assault on his person! Echo, however, thinking that because of her own biased use of his words she has been invited to love, suffers terrible shock from his repulse.

390–92 *ille fugit*: Ovid used the same words in identical metrical position at 228 to describe the vain flight of another hunter, Actaeon. The word order of 391 may be simplified as follows: *emoriar antequam sit*. Translate *emoriar* as future indicative; it is a strong assertion of intended action. *sit tibi copia nostri*: Fränkel called special attention to the importance of this clause in Ovid’s story. Whereas Narcissus is so intent on denying himself to others that he proclaims his determination to die rather than giving Echo access to himself, she freely offers herself without reservation to him. By dropping the two opening words of Narcissus’ outcry, which subordinate the clause (essentially negating it) to his death-wish, Echo converts the anticipatory subjunctive to a jussive, a genuine invitation to love to which he, in arrogant coldness, cannot accede.

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ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo;
ille fugit fugiensque 'manus complexibus aufer!
ante' ait 'emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri';
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METAMORPHOSES III

Scansion

Fōrtē pūēr cōmītūm sēductūs āb āgmīnē fīdō
380 dīxērāt: "Ēcquīs ādēst?", ēt "ādēst" rēspōndērāt Ēchō.
Hīc stūpēt, ūtque āciēm pārtēs dīmīttīt īn ōmnēs,
vōcē "vēnī" māgnā clāmāt: vōcāt illā vōcāntēm.
Rēspīcīt ēt rūrsūs nūllō vēnīēntē "quīd" īnquīt
"mē fūgīs?" ēt tōtīdēm, quōt dīxīt, vērbā rēcēpīt.
385 Pērstāt ēt āltērnaē dēcēptūs īmāgīnē vōcīs
"hūc cōēāmūs" āīt, nūllīquē lībēntiūs ūmquām
rēspōnsūrā sōnō "cōēāmūs" rēttūlīt Ēchō,
ēt vērbīs fāvēt īpsā sūīs ēgrēssāquē sīlvā
ībāt, ūt īnīcērēt spērātō brācchiā cōllō.

Learning and Practice



READ OVER THE INFORMATION
ON POETRY AND STYLE



PRACTISE USING THE
EXERCISES IN *RL:T&V* 6D

1,500 Word Commentary Exercise

- You should begin with an extract of unadapted Latin poetry of around 15 lines
- I recommend that you choose an extract from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or *Fasti*, as these are the texts from which our practice extracts have been selected
- Recommended passages are listed at the end of this lecture
- A commentary exercise allows you to consolidate skills in working with grammar, syntax and linguistic features using handbooks and dictionaries, while also beginning to work with the wider literary and historical contexts of Latin texts

1,500 Word Commentary Exercise

- The 1,500 word translation and commentary exercise must contain:
 - Your own independent translation of the chosen text passage
 - Your own independent commentary on the chosen text passage
 - A bibliography of works used, including ancient and modern sources
- The bibliography does not contribute to the word count; however, any footnotes you may use, do.

Deadlines

- The translation/commentary is 25% of the portfolio mark.
- Submission of this commentary exercise (via Turnitin) is due no later than 2359 on Sunday 11 May 2025.

Choice of Focus

- You may select your focus according to your own interest:
 - Some of you will be interested in the literary context, some in the grammar and syntax used, some in linguistic development or matters of metre.
 - You are strongly encouraged to follow what interests you!
- You should state your focus clearly at the beginning so as to manage reader expectations
 - Where appropriate, refer readers to other commentaries or scholarship that cover issues you won't deal with
- Issues a commentary must deal with:
 - Difficult and unusual phrases or content, serious problems in the text (eg. missing lines, or emendations that might change the interpretation of the passage)
 - Explanation of the most salient elements of the passage.

Key Resources for Commentary Writing

- [Advanced dictionary](#) to help find constructions and parallel usages
- Advanced grammar and syntax handbook to help explain constructions and metrical patterns
 - [Gildersleeve and Lodge](#)
 - [Allen and Greenough's Latin Grammar](#)
- Existing commentaries on the text
- Standard translations often also have notes on the text, either as footnotes or as an appendix. These basic resources will allow you to produce a valid, text-focussed commentary, particularly if you take into account the bibliographical references they contain. Oxford Bibliographies Online is also a great resource to begin with.

Suggested commentary passages

- Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.528-545 (...*serpentis*)
 - Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.670-686
 - Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.710-725 (...*ait*)
 - Ovid *Fasti* 1.1-16
 - Ovid *Fasti* 1.421-436
 - Ovid *Fasti* 1.509-524
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- If you wish to choose an alternative passage, please make sure I have approved it first.

Learning and Practice



READ OVER OVID [MET. 3](#) AND/OR
[FASTI 1](#) IN TRANSLATION



[SELECT A PASSAGE](#) FROM THE LIST
FOR YOUR COMMENTARY



Homework

The homework to be submitted for formative assessment this week is:

- Translate the Latin poetry extracts in the Week 9 tab.
- Deadline Sunday 27 April 2025

The Turnitin link will go live Monday 31 March and can be found in the Moodle section for Introduction to Latin Poetry. Feedback will be given in the seminar, 1230 on Monday 28 April.
