

Notes on Scansion for Chapter XXXII, Lingua Latina Vol. II

There are three meters that we shall study in this chapter: Pentameter, Hexameter, and Hendecasyllabus. In order to be able to read these three types of verses, one must learn several terms and concepts concerning the art of reading Latin poetry. This art is called scansion.

## A. Syllables:

Syllables in Latin poetry are long or short.

## 1. Long syllables end in:

- a. A long vowel e.g. ā
- b. Diphthongs: ae, oe, au, eu  
ui ( in cui and huic )  
ei ( rare words such as hei! )
- c. One consonant

## 2. Short syllables end in a short vowel.

Example of a line of poetry with long and short syllables:

Nōn egō nōbīlium sedeō studiōsus equōrum.

Short: e, go, bi, li, se, de, stu, di, su

Long: Nō, nō, um, ō, quō, rum

In the above single line we see the genius of Latin sound which strives always through liason, elision, etc. to achieve in poetry syllables which begin with a consonant and end in a vowel. This is not always possible, but one must always try to achieve the following combination of sounds: consonant-vowel/ consonant-vowel

cv/cv/cv/cv/cv/

e.g. Nōn ego nōbīlium sedeō studiōsus equōrum  
cv/ cv/cv/ cv/cv/cv/vc/ cv/cv/v/ cv/cv/v/cv/cv/cv/cv

Note: Sometimes vowels which are usually long, have to be read in poetry as short as: illius for illīus

very often o for ō as in mitto for mittō.

Likewise the consonant clusters br, cr, dr, gr, pr, tr ( and likewise cl, pl ) which usually begin a syllable are sometimes divided by the poets as appears in these examples:

tē-neb-rae instead of tē-ne-brae  
mē-di-oc-ri-a instead of mē-di-ō-c<sup>ri</sup>-a  
fēb-rim instead of fē-brim  
nīg-rōs instead of nī-grōs

Note: Vowels before j and x are usually long.

## B. Liaison and Elision:

H's are silent in Latin poetry except at the very beginning of a poetic line.

1. Liaison: The last consonant of a word is linked with the with the first vowel or h of a following word.  
e.g. stu/ di/ o/ su/ s<sub>v</sub>e/ quō/ rum
2. Elision: The final vowel ( and also -am, -em, -im, and -um ) drops out before the first vowel or h of the following word.

e.g.  $\overline{\text{Ars}} \check{\text{r}}\check{\text{e}} \check{\text{m}}\check{\text{a}} | \overline{\text{net}} \check{\text{v}}\check{\text{i}} | \overline{\text{tam}} \check{\text{q}}\check{\text{u}}(\check{\text{e}}) \check{\text{m}}\check{\text{o}} \check{\text{m}}\check{\text{i}} |$   
 e.g.  $\overline{\text{Ad}} \overline{\text{s}}\overline{\text{o}} | \overline{\text{lam}} \check{\text{d}}\check{\text{o}} \check{\text{m}}\check{\text{i}} | \overline{\text{n}}(\text{am}) \check{\text{u}}\check{\text{s}} \check{\text{q}}\check{\text{u}}\check{\text{e}}$

EXCEPTION: In est and es the e drops out after a vowel or m.

e.g. sola (e)st  
 bella (e)s  
 ubi (e)st  
 quantum (e)st  
 etc.

## C. Feet:

1. Feet of 2 syllables are trochées, iambic feet, or spondées.

spondées: — — 2 long syllables  
 trochées: — ∪ 1 long and 1 short  
 iambic foot: ∪ —

2. Feet of 3 syllables are dactyls and anapests.

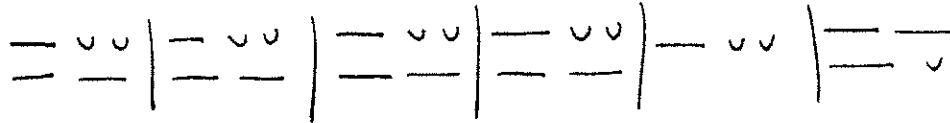
dactyls: — ∪ ∪  
 anapests: ∪ ∪ —

NOTE: In spondées, trochées, and dactyls, the beat ( called ictus ) falls on the first syllable and must be read on a higher tone than the other syllable(s).

## D. Meters:

## 1. HEXAMETER

The hexameter is the most common meter in Latin poetry. The meter is as follows:



This type of verse is called hexameter from the number of feet, for sex in Greek is pronounced "hex". Most literary terms in Latin come from the Greek. The hexameter consists of 5 dactyls and one spondee (or trochee). In the first 4 feet, spondees are often found instead of dactyls, but the fifth foot is almost always a dactyl.

e.g.  $\overline{\text{Ar}} \ \cup \ \cup \ \cup \ | \ \overline{\text{rum}} \ \cup \ \cup \ \cup \ | \ \overline{\text{no}} \ || \ \overline{\text{Tro}} \ | \ \overline{\text{jae}} \ \cup \ \cup \ | \ \overline{\text{pri}} \ \cup \ \cup \ \cup \ | \ \overline{\text{or}} \ \cup \ \cup \ \cup \ | \ \overline{\text{is}}$ .

Sound: Dactyls are sometimes used to represent lightness and grace; spondees, heaviness and gloom.

Caesura: This is a pause which usually occurs in a hexameter after the 1st syllable of the third foot. This is called a masculine caesura. The caesura rarely occurs in the third foot after the 2nd syllable, but when it does, it is called a feminine caesura and is used mainly to indicate a sensation of faltering, falling, or awkwardness. The caesura may, according to the sense of a line fall in the fourth after the first syllable. One line, according to the sense, may have two caesuras which would fall after the first syllable in the second and fourth foot.

## 2. PENTAMETER

This first consists of two parts of which each part contains 2 and a half feet. Since, therefore, the whole verse seems to consist of five feet, it is called pentameter from the Greek pronunciation of five "pente".

The meter is as follows:



The first two feet may be dactyls or spondees. The third foot is a split spondee in the middle of which is a fixed caesura. The fourth and fifth feet are always dactyls.

The combination of a pentameter following a hexameter is called Elegiac Couplet. Ovid and Martial often wrote in this style.

e.g.  $\overline{\text{In}} \ \overline{\text{gr}} \ \overline{\text{e}} \ \overline{\text{mi}} \ | \ \overline{\text{o}} \ \overline{\text{s}} \ \overline{\text{e}} \ \overline{\text{dit}} \ || \ \overline{\text{pr}} \ \overline{\text{o}} \ \overline{\text{ti}} \ \overline{\text{nu}} \ | \ \overline{\text{s}} \ \overline{\text{il}} \ \overline{\text{la}} \ \overline{\text{me}} \ | \ \overline{\text{o}}$   
e.g.  $\overline{\text{Et}} \ \overline{\text{qu}} \ \overline{\text{ae}} \ \overline{\text{m}} \ \overline{\text{e}} \ \overline{\text{per}} \ \overline{\text{dunt}} \ || \ \overline{\text{o}} \ \overline{\text{s}} \ \overline{\text{cu}} \ \overline{\text{la}} \ | \ \overline{\text{m}} \ \overline{\text{il}} \ \overline{\text{le}} \ \overline{\text{de}} \ | \ \overline{\text{dit}}$ .

## 3. VERSUS HENDECASYLLABUS

The famous poet Catullus used this type of verse quite often. The meter is as follows:



The number of syllables of this verse is eleven from which comes its name, for in Greek undecim is read as "hendeca". This verse consists of five feet: a spondee ( very rarely a trochee or iambic foot ), a dactyl, two trochees, a spondee or trochee.

e. g.    — — | — ∪ ∪ | — ∪ | — —

          Pas ser | mor tu u | s est me | ae pu | el lae.

## E. Hints for Scanning:

1. Mark off the liaisons and elisions first.
2. Mark off the syllables as being either long or short according to the cv/ cv/ cv/ cv/ etc. sound system
3. Mark off the feet.
4. Write in the caesura for the hexameter and pentameter.
5. Practice reading the line aloud while remembering that the ictus falls on the first syllable of a given foot and that the other syllables within a foot are pronounced on descending tones.
6. DO NOT EXPECT INSTANT GRATIFICATION. Scanning is a skill that comes after much practice.