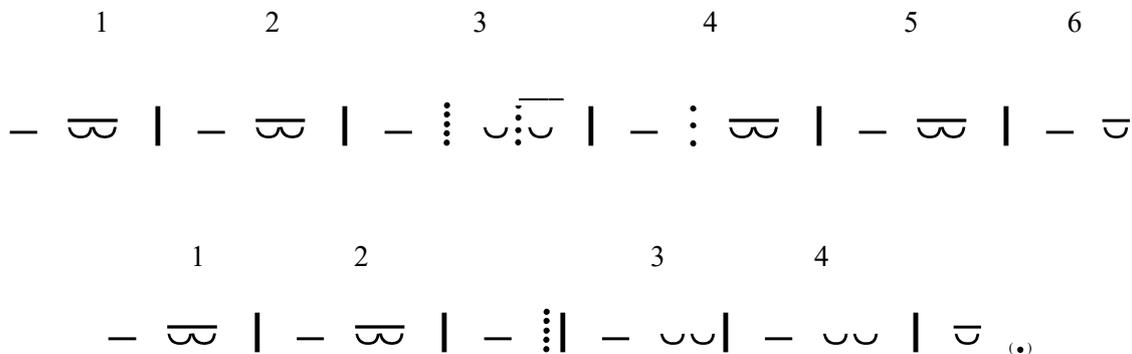


## Greek and Latin Metre V

### The Dactylic Pentameter (& Elegiac Couplet)



- The dactylic ‘pentameter’ (the second of the lines above) is a misnomer, since it does not contain ‘five’ of anything, let alone of a single μέτρον. The term was coined in antiquity on the ground that the line has two sets of 2 ½ dactylic *metra*. N.B. It is conventional to label the two dactylic feet of the second half of the verse as the third and fourth ‘feet’.
- The pentameter was very rarely employed as a self-standing metrical unit, but was rather paired with a preceding hexameter to form the ‘elegiac distich’ (or ‘couplet’).
- The ‘elegiac distich’ is not strictly a ‘stichic’ metrical form but rather a two-line strophe, which can be repeated *ad lib.* Any elegiac composition will necessarily have an even number of lines, the odd-numbered being hexametric, the even-numbered pentametric.
- The elegiac distich is attested from the seventh cent. B.C. in literature (Callinus, Tyrtaeus, Archilochus) and epigraphy; from the fifth century B.C. onwards it was the standard metre for verse inscriptions.
- The range of the metre was diverse from its earliest employment: songs of war; political or moral diatribes; expressions of grief, or the woes of love. In the Hellenistic Era, the metre was generally used for mythological narrative or for short, pithy epigrams. It was not until Latin poetry of the first century B.C. that the metre became *especially* associated with love poetry.

#### Some Elegiac Specimens:

Archil. 5 (c.650 B.C.)	ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαΐων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἦν παρὰ θάμνω ἔντος ἀμώμητον, κάλλιπον οὐκ ἐθέλων.
Enn. <i>uar.</i> 19-20 (c.180 B.C.)	<i>hic est ille situs cui nemo ciui(s) neq(ue) hostis quiuit pro factis redder(e) opis pretium.</i>
Cat. 66.1-2 (early 50s B.C.)	<i>omnia qui magni dispexit lumina mundi, qui tellar(um) ortus comperit atq(ue) obitus.</i>

## Dactyls vs spondees:

- **Hexameter:** the frequency and arrangement of dactyls and spondees is largely the same as in the stichic metre (see Lecture IV). However, fifth-foot spondees are deployed more sparingly in the hexameter of elegiacs (and almost always with Greek proper nouns). A trend towards a greater frequency of dactyls in the line peaks in Ovid, the most dactylic Latin poet.
- **Pentameter:** contraction of the *biceps* into a *longum* can occur in the first two feet of the pentameter, as in the hexameter. In the third and fourth feet, however, the dactylic rhythm is invariably retained in Greek and Latin literature (before the final *longum* / *brevis in longo*).
- In the first two feet, DS is the most common arrangement (over 50% in Augustan elegy), followed by DD; SD and SS each account for under 10%.

## Caesurae, pauses and diaereses:

- The treatment of caesurae etc. in the hexameter is largely the same as in the stichic metre.
- The pentameter must have a break at the half-way point, i.e. after the first ‘hemiepes’ or ‘hemistich’ (—∪—∪—); the caesura is thus ‘penthemimeral’.
- Elision can occur at this caesura but it is relatively rare in Greek and very rare in Latin. E.g.

Archilochus 14.2            οὐδεὶς ἄν μάλα πόλλ’ ἰμερόεντα πάθοι.

Cat. 75.4                    *nec desistere amare, ἰ omnia si facias.*

- Hiatus is rarely observed at the caesura in Greek; it is inadmissible in the Latin pentameter.
- Any other caesurae or diaereses in the pentameter are, in Greek practice, irrelevant, although it is noteworthy that word-division after the trochee (—∪) of the second foot is rare; this restriction does not apply in Latin elegiacs.
- There is no stipulation in Greek about how many syllables the final word(s) of the pentameter should possess; for the stark difference in Latin practice, see below.
- In later Greek writers of the Hellenistic period (esp. Callimachus) and most Latin elegists, care is taken that, if a monosyllable precedes the caesura, it is preceded by *either* a long monosyllable *or* a pyrrhic word (proclitic or otherwise). E.g. Callim. *Ep.* 45.4:

εὐ γ’ ἐμός· οὐ παρὰ τὰς ἰ εἴκοσι μεμφόμεθα.

- Sense pause at the end of the hexameter remains common (roughly 50% in Greek); however, sense pause at the end of the pentameter (and thus couplet) becomes very regular indeed (85% in Greek, always over 90% in Latin). In cases where the sense continues between couplets, pauses – usually conveyed by commata or (semi-)cola – are still almost mandatory.

## Latin Refinement of the Elegiac Couplet:

- The elegiac couplet is first attested in Latin literature with Ennius, but he seems to have used it only as an occasional diversion from hexametric and iambo-trochaic metres. It was not until the beginning of the first century B.C., in the persons of Q. Lutatius Catulus (consul 102 B.C.), Valerius Aedituus and Porcius Licinius, that the metrical form was put to concerted use, apparently inspired by Alexandrian practice. Cf., e.g., Val. Aedituus *fr.* 2:

*quid faculam praefers, Phileros, qua est nil opus nobis?  
ibimus sic, lucet pectore flamma satis.*

- Fifty years later Catullus brought a new prestige and popularity to the elegiac couplet, and in his hands, as well as those of Cornelius Gallus (c.70-26 B.C), Roman love elegy was born.
- Tibullus and Propertius refined the practice before it reached its greatest virtuosity in Ovid, who perhaps toyed with the form to the point of extinction: no extant Roman writer composed primarily in elegiacs after Ovid.
- The following refinements effectively become rules for the composition of elegiac couplets in the Augustan Age and thereafter:
- The hexameter almost always has its caesura in the third foot (strong or weak); in Ovid the figure is 99.9%. Lines lacking it are to be regarded as ‘non-caesural’, e.g. Tib. I.1.77:

*ferte et opes; ego composito securus aceruo*

Such lines generally have strong fourth-foot and strong second-foot caesurae.

- A weak caesura in the third foot is almost always preceded by a strong second-foot caesura, and very often a strong fourth-foot. This caesura, which accounts for over 50% of cases in the hexameters of Greek elegists, accounts for less than 10% in Latin.
- As with the Classical Latin hexameter, the hexameter of the elegiac couplet regularly ended with words of two or three syllables.
- In the pentameter, although trisyllabic (+) and monosyllabic endings were found in earlier poets, both Greek and Latin, the Augustan elegists standardised a **disyllabic close** to the couplet, i.e. of either iambic (υ-) or pyrrhic (υυ) words. Whereas under 40% of Catullus’ pentameters end with such words, a process of refinement can be seen in the figures for Propertius: Book I 64%; II 88.5%; III 97.6%; IV 99%. In Ovid the figure exceeds 99.5%.
- As with the scansion of the hexameter, the prodelision of *est* (etc.) is ignored in counting syllables at line end; thus an elegiac pentameter ending with, e.g., *dea est* is acceptable (υ-).
- A spondaic first word in the pentameter with a sense pause following is very rare, accounting for well under 1% of lines.
- A monosyllable closing the first hemiepes of the pentameter should (as in Hellenistic Greek) be preceded by either a long monosyllable or a pyrrhic word.
- A tendency is evident to construct the first hemiepes in such a way that the words could not stand, in the same order, in the second hemiepes. In instances where they could be inverted, the verse often possesses a designedly jingle-like quality, e.g.

Ou. *Am.* II.11.6      *Nereidesque deae Nereidumque pater*

perience; different perspectives give different results. Seneca the Elder tells the (probably apocryphal) story (*Controversiae* 2.2.12) that one of Ovid’s three favorite lines in his own poetry (in fact, the first among them) was “semibovemque virum et semivirumque bovem [the halfbull man and halfman bull]” (*Ars* 2.24), a description of the Minotaur born from Pasiphae’s unholy love for a bull. Each

R. Hanning, *Serious Play: Desire and Authority in the Poetry of Ovid, Chaucer and Ariosto* (Columbia UP, 2010) 32

Such pentameters account for 0.7% in Tibullus, 3.7% in Propertius, and 1% in Ovid.

- The final word of the pentameter is typically (>97%) a noun (or pronoun) or a verb; adverbs, adjectives and present participles are rare, and generally carry particular force.
- Short open vowels, especially -*ā*, rarely stand at the close of the couplet: 4% in Tibullus and Propertius, 1% in Ovid.    verb/(pro)noun

## Polysyllabic endings in Latin:

For the sake of variation, however, one occasionally finds a departure from the *de rigueur* disyllabic close to the **pentameter**, and words of four or more syllables at the close of the line.

Most typical among polysyllabic endings are those of four syllables, e.g.:

Ou. *Fast.* V.582:            *et circumfusus inuia fluminibus*

However, longer words are occasionally attested:

of five syllables:        Ou. *Her.* XVI.290        *lis est cum forma magna pudicitiae*        (rare)

of six syllables:        Ou. *Ibis* 508            *Phryx et uenator sis Berecynthiades*        (v. rare)

of seven syllables:     Cat. 68.12              *audit falsiparens Amphitryoniades*        (v. rare)

N.B. Trisyllabic closes are exceptionally rare: 1.5 % in Tib., 3 % in Prop., and less than 0.03% (i.e. thrice) in Ovid, e.g.:

Ou. *Ex P.* III.6.46        *uix excusari posse mihi uideor*

The **hexameter** typically closes with words of two or three syllables, although four- and five-syllabled words occasionally appear, almost entirely in the case of Greek proper nouns, e.g.:

Ou. *A.* I.6.53:            *si satis es raptae, Borea, memor Orithyiae*

Among the rare counterexamples are:

Prop. II.26.15            *et tibi ob inuidiam Nereides increpitarent*

Ou. *Ex P.* II.28.49        *sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum*

Final monosyllables (which are not enclitic) are exceptionally rare in the hexameter and not attested in the pentameter – except 4x in the casual practice of Martial. The few examples include:

Ou. *Ex P.* II.47            *at tu, cui bibitur felicius Aonius fons*        (hex.)

Mart. I.32.1-2            *non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare:  
hoc tantum possum dicere, non amo te.*

For a *tour-de-force* pentameter of two words, see Rutilius Namatianus (5<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) *De red. suo*: 1.450 *Bellerophonteis sollicitudinibus*.

Legend has it that some Etonians once produced the two-word hexameter *perturbabantur Constantinopolitani* and sent it to rivals at Westminster/Winchester, who by return of post completed the couplet with *innumerabilibus sollicitudinibus*. The same story is also told throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Oxford (hexameter, with similar false quantity) and Cambridge (pentameter).

## Elision:

- Elision is rarer in elegiac than hexametric poetry and becomes rarer as the first century B.C. develops. Catullus tends to have one or two elisions per couplet, whereas Ovid generally has a single instance to every four or five couplets.
- Elision at the caesura in the hexameter is very rare, and is almost unknown at the caesura of the pentameter after Catullus, but cf. e.g.:

Prop. III.22.10            *Herculis Antaeique Hesperidumque choros*

(where the Greek flavour of the line is no doubt significant).

- In the pentameter, elision never occurs after either the trochee or the dactyl / spondee of the second foot: e.g., *omnia nomina habet* would not be an admissible hemistich.
- Elision is extremely rare in the second hemistich of the pentameter (<1% in Ovid) and is always of a short vowel (or occasionally *-m*).
- It is both a reflection of the comparative youth of the Latin elegiac couplet and the impassioned nature of his subject matter that led Catullus to write couplets such as 73.5-6:

*ut mihi, quem nemo grauius nec acerbius urget  
quam modo qui me unum atque unicum amicum habuit.*

and 68.89-90:

*Troia (nefas) commune sepulcrum Asiae Europaeque,  
Troia uirum et uirtutum omnium acerba cinis.*

## Synaphea:

- When one metrical line is influenced in scansional terms by the following line, this relationship is termed 'synaphea'. Very occasionally in Greek is synaphea observed between the hexameter and pentameter, although this experimentation was not carried over into Latin:

Simon. *Ep.* 1:

ἦ μέγ' Ἀθηναίοισι φώως γένεθ', ἠνίκ' Ἀριστο-  
γείτων Ἴππαρχον κτεῖνε καὶ Ἀρμόδιος.

Callim. *Ep.* 41.1-2 (mentioned in the context of hypermetre in Lecture IV):

ἦμισύ μευ ψυχῆς ἔτι τὸ πνέον, ἦμισυ δ' οὐκ οἶδ'  
εἶτ' Ἔρος εἶτ' Αἴδης ἥρπασε, πλὴν ἀφανές.

Cf. Ovid's mock complaint to his addressee Tūtīcānus about being unable to fit this name into the elegiac couplet in *Ex P.* IV.12, esp. vv. 7-10: *nam pudet in geminos ita nomen scindere uersus, | desinat ut prior hoc incipiatque minor, | et pudeat, si te, qua syllaba parte moratur, | artius appellem Tuticanumque uocem.*

