

Meter and Style in Ovid, *Amores* 1.2.1-26*Amores* 1.2.1-26

	Ésse quid ¹ hóc di ¹ cam, quod ¹ tám mihi dúra vi ¹ déntur	DSSD
	stráta, ne ¹ qu(e) ín lec ¹ to pállia nóstra se ¹ dent,	DS
	ét vacu ¹ us som ¹ no noc ¹ tem quam lónga pe ¹ régi,	DSSS
	lássaque ¹ versa ¹ ti córporis óssa do ¹ lent?	DS
5	nám, puto, senti ¹ rem, si ¹ quó tem ¹ ptárer a ¹ móre — ¹	DSSS
	án subit ¹ ét tec ¹ ta cállidus árte no ¹ cet?	DS
	síc erit: haese ¹ runt tenu ¹ es in córde sag ¹ íttae,	DSDS
	ét pos ¹ séssa fe ¹ rus péctora vérsat A ¹ mor.	SD
	cédimus, án subi ¹ tum luc ¹ tánd(o) ac ¹ céndimus ¹ ígnem?	DDSS
10	ceda ¹ mus: leve ¹ fit, quód bene fértur, o ¹ nus.	SD
	víd(i) ego ¹ iacta ¹ tas mo ¹ ta face créscere ¹ flámmas	DSSD
	ét vídi nul ¹ lo cóncuti ¹ énte mo ¹ ri;	SS
	vérbera ¹ plúra fe ¹ runt quam ¹ quós iuvat úsus a ¹ rátri,	DDSD
	detrac ¹ tant pren ¹ si dúm iuga práma bo ¹ ves;	SS
15	ásper e ¹ quus du ¹ ris con ¹ túnditur óra lu ¹ pátis:	DSSD
	fréna mi ¹ nus sen ¹ tit, quísqvis ad árma fa ¹ cit.	DS
	ácrius ¹ invi ¹ tos mul ¹ tóque fe ¹ rócius ¹ úrget,	DSSD
	quám qui ¹ servi ¹ tum férre fa ¹ téntur, A ¹ mor.	SD
	én ego, confite ¹ or, tua ¹ súm nova praéda Cu ¹ pído;	DDDD
20	porrigi ¹ mus vic ¹ tas ád tua iúra ma ¹ nus.	DS
	níl opus ¹ ést bello: veni ¹ am pa ¹ cémque ro ¹ gámus;	DSDS
	néc tibi ¹ laús ar ¹ mis víctus i ¹ nérmis e ¹ ro.	DS
	nécte co ¹ mam myr ¹ to, ma ¹ térnas iúnge co ¹ lúmbas;	DSSS
	quí dece ¹ at, cur ¹ rum vítricus ípse da ¹ bit;	DS
25	ínque da ¹ to cur ¹ ru, popu ¹ lo cla ¹ mánte tri ¹ úmphum,	DSDS
	stábis et ¹ adiunc ¹ tas árte mo ¹ vébis a ¹ ves.	DS

¹Additional note re scansion: words such as *puto* (line 5), *ego* (lines 11 and 19), and *tibi* (line 22) are scanned with a short final syllable due to a phenomenon known as iambic shortening or *brevis brevians* (see J.W. Halporn *et al.*, *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, pp. 65-66), whereby a syllable that is long by nature, if preceded by a short syllable, is pronounced as short when the natural word accent falls on the syllable immediately preceding or following it.

The 13 Hexameters (first 4 feet only): 26 S, 26 D

DSSS — 3	DSSD — 4	DDSD — 1
	DSDS — 3	DDDD — 1
	DDSS — 1	

The 13 Pentameters (first 2 feet only): 15 S, 11 D

SS — 2	DS — 8
	SD — 3

Note: every hexameter begins with a dactyl and has a prominent penthemimeral caesura. Every pentameter ends in a disyllable.¹ The number of dactyls is relatively high in relation to other poets,² giving the verse a smooth, rapid quality. This effect is enhanced by a relatively high coincidence of ictus and accent in the fourth foot³ (in addition to that in the last two feet, where such coincidence is regular — lines 1, 5, 9, 15, 17, 23) and by the avoidance of elision (only 3 instances in 26 lines, all of them “mild” — final *-e, -o, -i* [of 1st person singular perfect indicative active]).⁴

The couplets themselves form neat autonomous units: 12 of the 13 end in a period, semi-colon or question-mark, while in the one exception (the transition from line 2 to line 3) the second couplet is merely tacked on to the first by the *et* that opens line 3 (parataxis): the grammatical integrity of each couplet is left largely intact.⁵ Within the couplets themselves, the hexameter and the pentameter tend to display a similar independence. In 5 of the 13 couplets the pentameter is added on to the hexameter by means of *et, -que, nec, or an* (4, 6, 8, 12, 22); while in 2 other instances the pentameter is added on by means of asyndeton (20, 24). Enjambment between hexameter and pentameter, when it occurs, is relatively restrained: e.g. 1-2, 25-26 (run-over of 1 word — in each instance, a trochee [compare 1.1.1-2, 3-4, 11-12]); at 13-14 and 17-18 the subject of the main clause of the couplet is delayed until the end of the pentameter (in each case a disyllable). Thus, even where enjambment occurs, Ovid’s tendency to follow patterns creates a sense of regularity.

Clearly, Ovid does not play with ornate word order to the degree that Catullus does in his longer poems: we find the occasional chiasmus (4: *lassaque versati corporis ossa*), interwoven word order (8: *possessa ferus pectora . . . Amor*), and strategic placement of words (6: *tecta callidus arte*), but nothing to rival the Neoterics. Ovid (like Pope, another master of the highly-crafted couplet) does show a liking for epigrammatic effects (e.g. 10: *cedamus: leve fit, quot bene fertur, onus* — a line that also shows another Ovidian favorite, the rhetorical use of word echoes between hexameter and pentameter). (Note that all of the above examples are found in pentameters, the compact symmetry of which perhaps lent itself to such effects.)

¹J. Barsby, ed. *Ovid: Amores I* (Oxford, 1973) 21, n. 2 cites the following figures for percentage of pentameters ending in a disyllable: Catullus — 38, Propertius — 89, Tibullus — 93, Ovid — 100.

²Barsby 21, n. 2 cites the following figures for percentage of dactyls in variable feet: Catullus — 37, Propertius — 44, Tibullus — 48, Ovid — 57. Compare J.C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores* (Liverpool, 1987) 1.114.

³Note, in addition, the number of times the bucolic diaeresis is observed in the hexameters, whether accompanied by a pause or not. A similar diaeresis is regular at the end of the pentameters as well.

⁴Barsby 21, n. 2 cites the following figures for elisions per 100 lines: Catullus — 52, Propertius — 22, Tibullus — 14, Ovid — 13. Compare McKeown 1.114-15.

⁵Platnauer 27 cites the following percentages for enjambment between couplets: Propertius — 7, Tibullus — 9, Ovid — 5. Compare McKeown 1.108.

As for the sense: many couplets will be tautological, with the pentameter merely restating the thought of the hexameter (e.g. 7-8, 19-20, 21-22); others, with equal predictability, will present matched pairs of opposites (11-12, 15-16, 17-18).

On the whole, then, Ovid seems to aim at smoothness, ease, regularity, tidiness. Many find his verse to be monotonous, but he can achieve nice effects when he chooses: e.g. line 3, where the heavy concentration of spondees, the somber vowel sounds (*somno noctem, quam longa*), and the timely disruption created by the interjection, *quam longa*, all give a sense of the poet's nocturnal travails; or line 19, where the unbroken series of dactyls picks up the pace, so to speak, marking the transition to the second half of the poem — the poet's willing submission to Amor.

Contrast **Catullus 75**:

Huc est ¹ mens de ¹ ducta tu ¹ a, mea Lesbia, ¹ culpa	SSDD
atqu(e) ita ¹ s(e) offici ¹ o perdidit ipsa su ¹ o	DD
ut iam ¹ nec bene ¹ velle ¹ que ¹ at tibi, s(i) optima ¹ fias,	SDDD
nec de ¹ sister(e) am ¹ a r(e) omnia si faci ¹ as.	SD

This poem, despite its typically Catullan tone of brooding self-reflection, surely is intended to recall the Hellenistic amatory epigram, with its preponderance of dactyls (unusual — and difficult — for Latin¹), its use of the weak caesura in the third foot of line 1 (also called the trochaic caesura — relatively rare in Latin, for the reason adduced in n. 1), the obscuring of the caesura in line 3 (another trochaic caesura, to the degree it is felt), and the tidy disposition of the thought within the framework of the elegiac couplet (first couplet: anticipatory main clause, with the pentameter reiterating the thought of the hexameter and joined to it by *atque*; second couplet: result clause, with the pentameter joined to the hexameter by the correlative *nec*) — all of which result in an apparently effortless smoothness combined with a conscious elegance of form. While the number of elisions (4 in 4 lines) is high compared to Ovid's practice, all of them are mild (final *-e* and *-i* [of *si*]) and do not interfere with the flow of the verse. (Note the effect of *amar(e)* in line 4, however, which bonds the two halves of the concluding pentameter together to provide a final “rounding off” of the poem — an effect that would be very unusual in Ovid but is found, once again, in Greek verse.)

In c. 75, then, we find Catullus composing in a style that is consciously Hellenistic. In some regards it looks forward to Ovid's practice (the smooth, rapid flow; the orderly disposition of the thought within the framework of the elegiac couplets), yet it clearly is closer to Greek amatory epigram in format and style than is Ovid. Thus Catullus 75 provides a useful example of the distinction between Neoteric and Augustan poetic style.

¹Roughly speaking, the ratio of short to long syllables in Greek is 2:1, in Latin 1:2.

Now look at **Catullus 76**, a poem on the same theme as c. 75 and in the same meter, but very different in nature:¹

	Si qua re ¹ cordan ¹ ti bene ¹ facta pri ¹ ora vol ¹ uptas	DSDD
	est homi ¹ ni, cum ¹ se cogitat esse pi ¹ um,	DS
	nec san ¹ ctam vio ¹ lasse fi ¹ dem, nec foedere ¹ nullo	SDDS
	div(um) ad ¹ fallen ¹ dos numin(e) a ¹ bus(um) homi ¹ nes,	SS
5	multa pa ¹ rata ma ¹ nent in ¹ long(a) ae ¹ tate, Ca ¹ tulle,	DDSS
	ex hoc ¹ ingra ¹ to gaudi(a) a ¹ more ti ¹ bi.	SS
	nam quae ¹ cumqu(e) homi ¹ nes bene ¹ cuiqu(am) aut dicere ¹ possunt	SDDS
	aut face ¹ r(e), haec a ¹ te dictaque factaque ¹ sunt.	DS
	omnia ¹ qu(ae) ingra ¹ tae peri ¹ erunt credita ¹ menti.	DSDS
10	quare ¹ cur te ¹ te i(am) amplius excruci ¹ es?	SS
	quin t(u) ani ¹ m(o) offir ¹ mas at ¹ qu(e) istinc t(e) ipse re ¹ ducis	DSSS
	et dis ¹ invi ¹ tis desinis esse mi ¹ ser?	SS
	diffici ¹ l(e) est lon ¹ gum subi ¹ to de ¹ poner(e) a ¹ morem,	DSDS
	diffici ¹ l(e) est, ve ¹ r(um) hoc qua lubet effici ¹ as;	DS
15	una sa ¹ lus haec ¹ est, hoc ¹ est tibi pervin ¹ cendum,	DSSD
	hoc faci ¹ as, si ¹ v(e) id non pote sive po ¹ te.	DS
	o di, ¹ si ves ¹ trum (e)st mise ¹ rer(i), aut si quibus ¹ umquam	SSDS
	extre ¹ mam i(am) ip ¹ s(a) in morte tu ¹ listis o ¹ pem,	SS
	me mise ¹ r(um) aspici ¹ t(e) et, si ¹ vitam puriter ¹ egi,	DDSS
20	eripi ¹ t(e) hanc pes ¹ tem pernici ¹ emque mi ¹ hi,	DS
	quae mihi ¹ subre ¹ pens i ¹ mos ut torpor in ¹ artus	DSSS
	expulit ¹ ex om ¹ ni pectore laetiti ¹ as.	DS
	non i(am) il ¹ lud quae ¹ ro, con ¹ tra m(e) ut diligit ¹ illa,	SSSS
	aut, quod ¹ non potis ¹ est, esse pu ¹ dica ve ¹ lit:	SD
25	ipse va ¹ ler(e) op ¹ t(o) et tae ¹ tr(um) hunc de ¹ ponere ¹ morbum.	DSSS
	o di, ¹ reddite ¹ m(i) hoc pro pie ¹ tate me ¹ a.	SD

¹Compare Barsby pp. 20-21.

The 13 Hexameters (first 4 feet only): 31 S, 21 D

SSSS — 1	SDDS — 2	DSDD — 1
DSSS — 3	DSDS — 2	
SSDS — 1	DDSS — 2	
	DSSD — 1	

The 13 Pentameters (first 2 feet only): 18 S, 8 D

SS — 5	DS — 6
	SD — 2

While 26 lines do not provide a sufficient amount of data to draw any firm conclusions, certain tendencies are evident in Catullus 76 that distinguish it from *Am.* 1.2.1-26 and from c. 75.

Catullus 76 is more heavily spondaic than either of the other poems (31 spondees as opposed to 21 dactyls in the hexameters; 18 spondees as opposed to 8 dactyls in the pentameters). Note, in particular, line 15 — a σπονδιᾶζων, where the weight of the sonorous, polysyllabic *pervincendum*, reinforced by the bucolic diaeresis and the coincidence of ictus and accent, joins with the laboring meter to give a sense of the seriousness of the matter at hand (the need to overcome this obsessive love for Lesbia) and of the poet's own struggles against that love. Such poetic devices (and the “texturing” effect that they provide) are denied to Ovid by his insistence upon ease and regularity in the flow of his verse.

In the same vein, Catullus clearly strives for a bit more metrical variety than Ovid: in the 13 hexameters, the most frequent pattern is DSSS, which occurs 3 times. 3 other patterns occur twice, while 4 occur only once (as opposed to *Am.* 1.2.1-26, where 3 patterns account for 10 of the 13 hexameters). In the first half of the pentameter the patterns SS and DS predominate, each appearing approximately the same number of times. (Again, contrast *Am.* 1.2.1-16.) As opposed to Ovid, Catullus does not begin every hexameter with a dactyl (although dactyls predominate), nor do his pentameters routinely end in a disyllable. (8 of the 13 pentameters end in disyllables, 1 in a trisyllable, 3 in a tetrasyllable, and 1 in a strong monosyllable [line 8: *dictaque factaque sunt* — a deliberate attempt at archaic ruggedness of style that would scarcely do for Ovid].) Like Ovid, Catullus shows a liking for the penthemimeral caesura. (Note the penthemimeral caesura in line 3, however.)

Equally as important as counting dactyls and spondees, however, is observing how words are fit into those patterns — the relation between meter and word-shape. One of the first things one notices in this regard is the number of elisions (32 in 26 lines) and, frequently, their ruggedness (e.g. final *-um*, *-am*, *-ae*, *-i* [of syncopated dative singular *mi*]; elisions often before words beginning with *h*). Again, this adds to the sense of the poet's troubled state of mind, but is quite alien to Ovid's practice. Ovid's desire for a light rapidity also will lead him to use a relatively large number of monosyllables and disyllables. Contrast *Am.* 1.2.1 with Catullus 76.1: the weighty sonorousness of the latter is due in large part to the lengthy *recordanti* and (less so) *benefacta*. (Again, compare the *pervincendum* of line 15.)

Catullus' use of the couplet also is much more plastic than is Ovid's, as he attempts to express the depths of his disillusionment. Of the 13 couplets, 7 (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 17-18, 19-20, 21-22) display some form of enjambment — in several instances, enjambment of a more radical form than any found in *Am.* 1.2.1-26. In addition, lines 17-22 form a continuous utterance. In c. 76 the couplet does not have the autonomy that it displays in Ovid, nor the easy regularity.

Finally, here is **Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.296-308** (a somewhat strained comparison, since Vergil is not writing elegiacs, but interesting nonetheless):

	At re ¹ gina do ¹ los (quis ¹ fallere possit a ¹ mantem?)	SDSD
	praesen ¹ sit, mo ¹ tusqu(e) ex ¹ cepit prima fu ¹ turos	SSSS
	omnia ¹ tuta ti ¹ mens. ea ¹ d(em) impia Fama fu ¹ renti	DDDD
	detulit ¹ arma ¹ ri clas ¹ sem cur ¹ sumque pa ¹ rari.	DSSS
300	saevit i ¹ nops ani ¹ mi to ¹ tamqu(e) in ¹ censa per ¹ urbem	DDSS
	baccha ¹ tur qua ¹ lis com ¹ motis excita ¹ sacris	SSSS
	Thyias, u ¹ b(i) audi ¹ to stimu ¹ lant trie ¹ terica ¹ Baccho	DSDD
	orgia ¹ noctur ¹ nusque vo ¹ cat cla ¹ more Ci ¹ thaeron.	DSDS
	tand(em) his ¹ Aene ¹ an com ¹ pellat vocibus ¹ ultro:	SSSS
305	‘dissimu ¹ lar(e) eti ¹ am spe ¹ rasti, perfide, tantum	DDSS
	posse ne ¹ fas taci ¹ tusque me ¹ a de ¹ cedere ¹ terra?	SDDS
	nec te ¹ noster a ¹ mor nec ¹ te data dextera ¹ quondam	SDSD
	nec mori ¹ tura te ¹ net cru ¹ deli funere ¹ Dido?’	DDSS

13 Hexameters (first 4 feet only): 30 S, 22 D

SSSS — 3
DSSS — 1

DDSS — 3
SDSD — 2
SDDS — 1
DSDS — 1

DDDD — 1
DSDD — 1