ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XLIX

INDEX

FROM PERSIUS TO WILKINSON:
THE GOLDEN LINE REVISITED

SEPPO HEIKKINEN

Introduction

The golden line is the term used for an arrangement of words within a Latin hexameter line where the finite verb is surrounded by two hyperbata of noun and adjective, preferably in such a way that the adjectives precede their noun heads with the first adjective agreeing with the penultimate noun and the second with the final one (abVAB). The golden line has been taught as a particularly elegant stylistic device in English schools of the modern age, and, possibly as a result of this, it has also been adopted as a tool in the study of classical hexameter verse. Recent studies, most notably Kenneth Mayer's 2002 article,[1] have argued that the golden line is more properly a post-classical stylistic feature and that its central role in classical scholarship in the Anglophone world is the result of a long tradition of medieval scholarship originating with the Venerable Bede. This article focuses on an early presentation of the golden line in the late antique *Ars grammatica* of Diomedes and its telling misquotation of a metrical parody by the Silver-Age satirist Persius, arguing that the golden line was acknowledged as a stylistic device already in the classical period, although by no means universally appreciated.

---

[1] K. Mayer, "The Golden Line: Ancient and Medieval Lists of Special Hexameters and Modern Scholarship", in C. Lanham (ed.), *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: Classical Theory and Modern Practice*, London 2002, 139–79. The current English-language Wikipedia entry on the golden line relies extensively on Mayer's paper.

The golden line and its definitions

The golden line is a stylistic device of Latin verse that has received much attention in twentieth-century scholarship, at least in the English-speaking sphere. Although there is considerable variation among its various definitions, the golden line can, broadly speaking, be defined as a line of verse where a verb is framed by a double hyperbaton, that is, two noun-adjective pairs where each adjective attribute has been separated from its noun head. The golden line presumably has a long history as a technique taught in Latin verse composition classes, but it has also become a popular tool of classical scholarship. The most frequently quoted definition of the golden line is the one given by John Dryden in the preface to his 1685 *Sylvae*, where the device is described as "that verse which they call golden, of two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace".[2] Today, Dryden's take on the golden line is probably better known than the bulk of his poetry, mainly owing to its citation in L. P. Wilkinson's work *Golden Latin Artistry*, which has gained the standing of a classic.[3] Wilkinson, however, posed a set of further restrictions on the structure, apparently in keeping with how the feature was traditionally taught in the English-speaking sphere. After stating that "conjunctions, prepositions etc. can be ignored", he goes on: "Let us restrict the term, as is generally done, to lines in which the epithets and nouns appear in the corresponding order, that is, a b C A B: as in *grandia per multos tenuantur flumina rivos*."[4] Wilkinson, in other words, implicitly specifies that adjectives must precede their noun heads and that the first and second adjectives correspond with the penultimate and final nouns in the line (*grandia – flumina, multos – rivos*). Tellingly, Wilkinson's phrase "as is generally done" implies that this is how the golden line had traditionally been taught in the English classroom, and, indeed, Wilkinson essentially follows the description given in S. E. Winbolt's 1903 *Latin Hexameter Verse*, which enjoyed the stature of the standard work of reference on hexameter style.[5] To accommodate other line

---

[2] J. Dryden, *Sylvae: or, the Second Part of Poetic Miscellanies*, London 1685, reprinted in E. N. Hooker – H. T. Swedenburg (eds.), *The Works of John Dryden, Volume I: Poems, 1649 – 1680*, Berkeley – London 1961, 6.

[3] L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry*, Cambridge 1963, 215.

[4] Ov. *rem.* 445.

[5] S. E. Winbolt, *Latin Hexameter Verse: An Aid to Composition*, London 1903, at pp. 219–21,

types that would fit Dryden's looser definition, Wilkinson postulated what he jokingly called a "silver line", where the noun-adjective pairs were placed chiastically (as in Verg. *georg.* 2,540; **impositos** <u>duris</u> *crepitare* <u>incudibus</u> **ensis**) and even a "bronze line" where the line is framed by a single hyperbaton (as in Verg. *Aen*. 6,137; **aureus et foliis et lento vimine ramus**).[6] Although Wilkinson probably meant his typology to be taken with a grain of salt, it was adopted as such at least in Panhuis's 2006 Latin grammar.[7] When it comes to the definition of the golden line in the strictest sense, however, there seems to have been a fairly general consensus, at least from the seventeenth century onwards, regarding its basic structure. The earliest extant source to actually employ the term "golden" is a fairly obscure Latin grammar by Edward Burles from 1652, and his description is consistent with those of Winbolt and Wilkinson.[8] As the grammar never had a wide circulation and has only survived in four copies,[9] it is improbable that the work had any influence on subsequent definitions of the term; rather, it is probable that the golden line was firmly established as part and parcel of verse composition in the English classroom by his time, and Burles was merely

---

also cites Dryden, but Winbolt's definition of the golden line corresponds with Wilkinson's: "The perfection [of this separation] produces what is commonly known as the 'golden line,' which consists of two adjectives at the beginning and two nouns in the end, with a verb in the middle; as a rule, the first adjective agrees with the first noun, and the second adjective with second noun." Winbolt's work was a standard textbook in the instruction of Latin verse composition in British schools and constitutes Wilkinson's probable frame of reference as to how "is generally done". At pp. 222–3, Winbolt discusses "nearly golden" lines, which more or less correspond with Wilkinson's "silver" and "bronze" lines, but does not attempt to impose a similar system of classification on them.

[6] Wilkinson (above n. 3) 216–7.

[7] D. Panhuis, *Latin Grammar*, Ann Arbor 2006, 206. Panhuis's bronze line, however, differs from Wilkinson's in being simply a verse that contains "one or two hyperbata with the scheme abBA".

[8] E. Burles, *Grammatica Burlesa*, London 1652, facsimile ed. R. C. Alston, Menston 1971 (English Linguistics 1500-1800. A Collection of Facsimile Reprints. No. 307), 357: "*Epithets* are elegantly set before their *Substantives*, and if the *Verse* doe consist of two *Adjectives*, two *Substantives* and a *Verb* only, the first *Adjective* agreeing with the first *Substantive*, the second with the second, and the *Verb* placed in the midst, it is called a *Golden Verse*; as, *Lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae. Pendula flaventem pingebat bractea crinem.*" The first of Burles's examples is from Ovid (*met.* 1,147); the latter is anonymous but appears somewhat earlier in C. J. Clarke, *Manuductio ad Artem Carmificam seu Dux Poeticus*, London 1633, and seems to be a well-circulated classroom example; see Mayer (above n. 1) 166.

[9] Mayer (above n. 1) 139.

stating the obvious. This would imply that Dryden's looser characterisation of the golden line is merely a poetic aside to his readers whom he expects to be thoroughly familiar both with the term and with its meaning.

Although there appears to have been a general consensus as to the structure of the golden line, and English-language authors generally treat it as the hallmark of sophisticated classical hexameter style, the whole concept seems to have been, until quite recently, unknown outside the English-speaking sphere. Mentions of the golden line in non-English sources generally seem inspired by Wilkinson and acknowledge it to be a term of English scholarship.[10]

How classical is the golden line?

Mayer's 2002 article displays remarkable scepticism in its stance on the traditional (English) perception of the golden line. As the feature has until recently been virtually unknown outside the Anglophone world, it is plausible to think that it may really not constitute as central a feature of classical hexameter verse as Winbolt, Wilkinson *et al*. have led us to believe. Firstly, the structure is not discussed, with one possible exception to which we shall return, in any antique source on grammar or poetic style. Secondly, the statistics compiled by Mayer[11] indicate that, at least during the Augustan period, the golden line was not nearly as common as some modern scholarship would have us believe; rather, it seems to have evolved into a metrical mannerism during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, and to present the golden line as the crowning achievement of "Golden Latin artistry" is wide of the mark.

Mayer's statistics are based on a deliberately looser interpretation of the abVAB structure, as defined by Wilkinson, counting silver lines (abVBA) as a separate category.[12] Word orders where the noun comes first (AbVaB, aBVAb and ABVab for golden, aBVbA, AbVBa and ABVba for silver lines) are included. Prepositions, interjections and relative pronouns are allowed but extra verbs, nouns or adjectives are not. Centrally positioned participles count as verbs except when they agree with one of the nouns, and attributively used participles

---

[10] Mayer (above n. 1) 139.

[11] Mayer (above n. 1) 161–2.

[12] Mayer (above n. 1) 159.

count as adjectives. Using these criteria, Mayer has created statistics that give a good cross-view of the major classical and post-classical poets and some medieval works.

Mayer's statistics reveal that the use of golden word order prior to the Silver Age was very limited indeed: the author with the highest frequency of golden lines is Catullus (4.41% golden and 2.45% silver lines in Catull. 64).[13] That the golden line may indeed have been a neoteric affectation is reflected by the still relatively high frequency in Vergil's *Eclogues* (1.81% golden and 0.84% silver lines) but considerably lower one in his *Aeneid* (0.34% golden and 0.26% silver lines). The figures for other Augustan poets are negligible[14] and, indeed, make it questionable whether the golden line ever played a central role in classical hexameter technique. The Neronian age shows a considerable surge in the use of golden word order, and the feature seems to have become a virtual mannerism in late antique verse, with high figures in the verse of Ausonius (3.73% golden and 0.83% silver lines in the *Mosella*) and Claudian (3.58% golden and 1.08% silver lines in his *Panegyricus*) as well as the Christian poets Sedulius (3.93% golden and 0.23% silver in his *Carmen paschale*), Corippus (2.46% golden and 0.26% silver lines in his *Iohannis*; 3.57% golden and no silver lines in his *In laudem Iustini minoris*) and, above all, Ennodius (11.54% golden and no silver lines in his *Itinerarium*). That the surge in the number of "pure" golden lines is not paralleled by a similar development in the popularity of silver lines indicates that, in the schools of the late empire, the golden line was singled out as a particularly desirable arrangement of words, while other combinations of hyperbata did not acquire a similar status.[15] One factor that may have contributed to the popularity of the golden line may be that is its frequent concomitant

---

[13] Mayer (above n. 1) 161. That other poets of the period made less use of the structure does not, of course, necessarily mean that they did not use it deliberately.

[14] Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* have 0.35% golden and 0.10% silver lines, whereas the figures for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are somewhat higher (1.05% golden and 0.23% silver lines). The figures for *Culex* (4.35% golden, 1.21% silver) and *Ciris* (4.99% golden, 2.22% silver) from the *Appendix Vergiliana* show frequencies comparable to Catullus, but the precise dating and provenance of these works is, of course, uncertain.

[15] Mayer (above n. 1) 163. This is, of course, more properly a feature of Late Latin verse. Prior to Sedulius, poets who make free use of golden lines also more use of the silver line. The latter is always less frequent of the two, but that may be the natural result of metrical pressures, as it would often require that a word with a short final syllable agrees with a word with a long one.

is primitive leonine rhyme: if, in the abVAB sequence, the noun and its attribute share the same case ending, this results in homoeoteleuton between the portion preceding the caesura and the ending of the line. Roman attitudes to rhyme seem to have varied with the times: Quintilian, among others, dismissed it as jingle,[16] and it seems that several classical authors actually went out of their way to avoid it.[17] In the verse of Sedulius, on the other hand, the connection of golden word order and monosyllabic rhyme is apparent: this was even recognised by Bede who used the same Sedulian verse as an example of golden word order in his *De arte metrica* but as an illustration of homoeoteleuton in its companion work *De schematibus et tropis*.[18] It is probable that the Late Antique propensity for rhyme is connected to the use of the golden line, as this is not paralleled by a similar popularity of the non-rhyming, chiastic silver line.[19]

Statistics do not, of course, tell us the whole truth, and much of the information provided by Mayer was already anticipated in Winbolt's textbook on hexameter composition. Winbolt, too, notes that Vergil does not use the perfect golden line often but "apparently adopts it only where he evidently wishes his style to be particularly ornate and elaborate", going on to observe that "the Egyptian Claudian has golden lines to the verge of monotony" and that "Catul-

---

[16] Quint. *inst*. 9,4,73.

[17] Wilkinson (above n. 3) 33; S. J. Harrison, "Discordia Taetra: The History of a Hexameter Ending", *CQ* 41 (1991) 138–49 discusses specifically the avoidance of placing two words with an identical ending next to each other. It is, of course, conceivable that hyperbaton was employed specifically to avoid such a conjunction. On Sedulius's prominent use of rhyme, see B. Gładysz, *De extremis quibus Seduliana carmina ornantur verborum syllabis inter se consonantibus*, Lwów 1931 (Eus supplementa 17); D. Norberg, *Introduction to the Study of Medieval Latin Versification*, trans. J. C. Roti – J. de la Chapelle Skubly, ed. with an introduction by J. Ziolkowski, Washington, D. C. 2004, 31–2.

[18] Sedul. *carm*. *pasch*. 1,63, *pervia divisi patuerunt caerula ponti*, cited at C. B. Kendall (ed.), "De arte metrica et de schematibus et tropis" in C. W. Jones (ed.), *Bedae Venerabilis opera: opera didascalica 1*, Turnhout 1975 (Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina 123A), 59 – 171, at 113 and 149. The term "homoeoteleuton" can, in this context, be understood as synonymous with rhyme. The word "rhyme" and its cognates in the modern languages are probably a corruption of Medieval Latin *rhythmus* (*rithimus*, *riddimus*, *rismus* etc.) and reflect the use of regular end-rhyme as a central feature of medieval rhythmic verse; see E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, Leipzig 1898, 825; P. Klopsch, *Einführung in die Mittellateinische Verslehre*, Darmstadt 1972, 49.

[19] Mayer (above n. 1) 165.

lus uses them somewhat too freely".[20] What comes across even in Winbolt's presentation, however, is the impression that, at least for Vergil, golden word order was merely one among countless ways to arrange the words in a line of verse and that the Augustan age, if anything, represents a slump in its popularity.

How, then, did the golden line come to enjoy its current prestige in the study of classical verse? For a probable answer we must turn to its early theoretical presentations.

The golden line in medieval scholarship

The earliest creditable description of the golden line can be found in the Venerable Bede's treatise *De arte metrica*, composed in Northumbria in the early eighth century.[21] In his handbook on prosody and metre, Bede relied to an unprecedented degree on the authority of the Christian epic poets, supplanting where possible the traditional citations from Vergil and Horace with ones from such late antique Christians as Sedulius, Arator, Juvencus, Prosper of Aquitane, Paulinus of Nola and Venantius Fortunatus.[22] His particular favourite appears to have been Sedulius, who seemed to assume the stature of something approaching a "Christian Vergil". It is therefore no wonder that, in his short chapter on poetic style *Quae sit optima carminis forma*,[23] Bede relied on Sedulius's example to a high degree. Bede's chapter is remarkably sparse and has obviously not been intended as an exhaustive style guide, presenting merely a handful of stylistic devices that the author found particularly pleasing. The chapter opens with an introduction to the enjambment of hexameter lines, illustrated not with a Vergilian quotation, as one might expect, but a lengthy citation from Arator. After that Bede moves on to what is the first unequivocal presentation of the golden line. Given both Bede's admiration of Sedulius and Sedulius's (even statistically corroborated) fondness for golden word order, it is no wonder that the illustrations have all been taken from his *Carmen paschale*.

---

[20] Winbolt (above n. 5) 220–1.

[21] Kendall (above n. 18).

[22] S. Heikkinen, *The Christianisation of Latin Metre: a Study of Bede's* De arte metrica, Helsinki 2012, esp. at 13–6.

[23] Kendall (above n. 18) 111–6.

Optima autem versus dactylici ac pulcherrima positio est, cum primis penultima ac mediis respondent extrema, qua Sedulius frequenter uti consuevit, ut:

> *Pervia divisi patuerunt caerula ponti*

et

> *Sicca peregrinas stupuerunt marmora plantas.*[24]

[The best and most beautiful arrangement of a dactylic hexameter verse is when the next to the last word agrees with the first word and the final word agrees with a word in the middle, an arrangement which Sedulius was accustomed to use frequently, as in:

> **Pervia** <u>divisi</u> patuerunt **caerula** <u>ponti</u> (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1,136)

and

> **Sicca** <u>peregrinas</u> stupuerunt **marmora** <u>plantas</u> (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1,140).][25]

Bede does not seem to have been particularly dogmatic regarding this observation, as he also gives several examples that do not quite correspond with his previously stated definition but merely have agreement of a word in the middle with one at the end.[26] Conspicuously, he also does not specify the placement of the verb. Bede's discussion of the golden line reflects its high popularity in early Insular Latin verse, particularly the *Hisperica famina* and the hexameters of his immediate Anglo-Saxon predecessor Aldhelm; this, too, is probably largely attributable to the influence of Sedulius, whose works enjoyed a central role in the monastic curriculum and were widely studied and emulated.[27] In Aldhelm's

---

[24] Kendall (above n. 18) 113.

[25] Trans. C. B. Kendall (ed.), *Bede. Libri II De arte metrica et de schematibus et tropis: The art of Poetry and Rhetoric*, Saarbrücken 1991 (Bibliotheca Germanica: Series Nova 2), 103–5.

[26] Bede cites *Edidit* **humanas** <u>animal pecuale</u> **loquelas** (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1,162) and *Dignatus* **nostris** *accubitare* **thoris** (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1,2), which have only a single hyperbaton, as well as **Rubra** *quod* <u>adpositum</u> **testa** *ministrat* <u>holus</u> (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1,16), which has the golden abAB arrangement, although the verb has been placed between the two nouns.

[27] M. Winterbottom, "A Celtic Hyperbaton?", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1977) 207–12, at 210–1; N. Wright, "The *Hisperica Famina* and Caelius Sedulius", *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982) 61–76. On the golden line in Aldhelm, see A. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge 1994, 96–7. According to Mayer's statistics, Aldhelm's hexameter hagiography *Carmen*

verse, the golden line had become a gratuitous mannerism, and it is possible that Bede had this in mind when he stated that this word order should not be overused:[28] *Nec tamen hoc continuatim agendum, verum post aliquot interpositos versus. Si enim simper uno modo pedes ordinabis et versus, tametsi optimus sit, status statim vilescit.*[29] ("However, this should not be done constantly, but only after intervals of several lines. For if you always arrange your feet and verses in the same way, even if it is the best way, your composition is at once cheapened.")[30]

Bede's chapter on good poetic style ends with the recommendation that adjectives should preferably precede their noun heads and his reiterated observation that, favourably, they should be separated:[31]

> *Studendum est praeterea metricis, quantum artis decori non obstitit, ut mobilia nomina fixis nominibus praeponant, sed nec concinentia nomina coniunctim ponant, verum interposita qualibet alia parte orationis, ut:*
> *Mitis in inmitem virga est animata draconem.*[32]

> [Poets should also strive, so long as it does not interfere with the grace of their art, to place adjectives before their nouns, but not to put nouns and adjectives that are in agreement with each other side by side, but rather to interpose some other word, as:
> **Mitis** in <u>inmitem</u> **virga** est animata <u>draconem</u> (Sedul. *carm. pasch.* 1, 132).][33]

---

de virginitate has 6.47% golden and 0.49% silver lines. The figures for the *Hisperica famina* are even more striking: 23.53% golden and 0.16% silver lines; see Mayer (above n.1) 162.

[28] N. Wright, "The Metrical Art(s) of Bede", in K. O'Brien O'Keeffe – A. Orchard (eds.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. I, Toronto 2005, 167.

[29] Kendall (above n. 16) 113–4.

[30] Trans. Kendall (above n. 25) 105.

[31] Roman verse has a universally acknowledged tendency to place adjectives before their noun heads; see Winbolt (above n. 5) 153; E. Norden (ed.), *Aeneis Buch VI*, Leipzig 1916, 400–2; Harrison (above n. 17) 138.

[32] Kendall (above n. 18) 114–5.

[33] Trans. Kendall (above n. 25) 105.

It is therefore easy to see the probable origin of the "Burlesian" or "Wilkinsonian" golden line. It is the conflation of Bede's two stylistic guidelines: his commendation of the *ABAB* arrangement of noun-adjective pairs and his observation that adjectives should come before nouns. Mayer's studies on the successive discussions of the golden line in medieval treatises on poetics seem to indicate that this is indeed the case and that the early modern definition of the golden line is the result of an evolution that had Bede's seminal textbook as its starting point.[34]

Diomedes and the *versus teres*

In her *La metrica Latina en el Siglo IV*, Castillo pointed out a passage in Diomedes's fourth-century *Ars grammatica* that discusses what the author calls *versus teres*, or, in Mayer's translation, a "rounded verse" but, for all practical purposes seems to describe a golden line. Diomedes's *versus teres* is merely one of the various "special" hexameters discussed in his treatise, and the passage had previously escaped the notice of scholars owing to its considerable ambiguity; indeed, were it not for the hexameter line used as its illustration, we would have no idea of what the author was aiming at. Castillo herself concedes that "the definition does not narrow down its verbal composition as concretely as the current definitions",[35] which is putting it very mildly indeed, if we look at what Diomedes actually writes:

> *Teretes sunt, qui volubilem et cohaerentem continuant dictionem, ut*
> *Torva Mimalloneis inflatur tibia bombis.*[36]

---

[34]   Mayer (above n. 1) 165–6, has traced the gradual fusion of the two principles presented by Bede through Jacob Wimpfeling (1484), Conradus Celtis (1486), Jean Despauterius (1521) and John Clarke (1633), Burles's immediate precursor, who, however, does not use the term "golden line".

[35]   M. del Castillo Herrera, *La metrica latina en el Siglo IV: Diomedes y su entorno*, Granada 1990, 133: "la definición no precise su composición verbal tan concreta como las definiciones actuales"; English trans. Mayer (above n. 1) 152.

[36]   *Gramm*. I,499,20–2.

[Rounded verses are those that conjoin a fluent and contiguous phrase, such as

Torva Mimalloneis inflatur tibia bombis.][37]

Diomedes's illustration of his *versus teres* is apparently a misquotation of Persius 1,99 (*Torva Mimalloneis implerunt cornua bombis*), which, however, is itself a golden line. As we can see, Diomedes's example has the adjective-noun pairs (*torva – tibia, Mimalloneis – bombis*) framing the central verb in a strict abVAB formation, although Diomedes's "fluent and contiguous phrase" leaves much room for interpretation. The statement, indeed, eluded most scholars of the Renaissance and modern periods,[38] including no lesser a figure than Scaliger, who assumed that Diomedes meant a line where words do not end with feet (with the obvious exception of the fourth foot, where a word break takes place after *inflatur*, as Scaliger was quick to point out).[39] I find it, however, plausible that Diomedes's *volubilis et cohaerens dictio* implies a line that is syntactically self-contained, a feature that is typical of golden lines in their purest form, and indeed, the misquotation in Diomedes is, if anything, even more so than its original. The main difference between Diomedes's *Torva Mimalloneis inflatur tibia bombis* and Persius's *Torva Mimalloneis implerunt cornua bombis* is, apart from the substitution of *tibia* for *cornua* and the verb *inflo* for *impleo*, the use of the passive voice: Diomedes's *tibia* "is blown with the Mimallonean booms" whereas Persius's line implies an external "they" who blew on their horns. The line, as it appears in Diomedes, works better in isolation than the original, and I find it possible that Diomedes's anonymous source had adapted Persius's line into a form more suitable for classroom use.[40]

---

[37] Trans. Mayer (above n. 1) 152.

[38] Mayer (above n. 1) 153–4.

[39] J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem*, Stuttgart 1964, 71–2 (facsimile of the Lyon 1561 edition with an introduction by A. Buck). Scaliger´s uncharacteristically muddled commentary on Diomedes's equally enigmatic discussion has been discussed at length in Mayer (above n. 1) 167.

[40] The substitution of *inflo* for *impleo* is probably attributable to the fact that *inflo* is more obviously associated with wind instruments. The substitution of *tibia* for *cornua*, on the other hand may result from contamination through Catull. 64,264 (*barbaraque horribili stridebat tibia cantu*), which itself is a golden line. *Tibia* also has stronger eastern, or bucolic, connotations than *cornu*, which was also an instrument of the Roman military; see *TLL*, s.v. 'cornu'.

Diomedes's list of special hexameter types pertains to a tradition that apparently came about in the Silver Age: Martial, Quintilian and Gellius, among others, speak disparagingly of such trickery, mentioning, in particular, hexameter lines that, when read backwards, become sotadeans and hexameters where each word is longer than the previous one.[41] Several Late Latin grammarians inevitably reflected on this vogue, incorporating in their otherwise matter-of–fact works metrical trivia on unusual hexameter lines and their respective merits and demerits. The list of "special" hexameters in Diomedes's *Ars grammatica*, however, is particularly curious, as it has virtually no counterpart in any of the other lists that appear in the late antique grammarians. Diomedes lists twelve *optimi versus* and five *pessimi*, and, as Mayer has noted, the lists are conspicuously disparate. The list of *optimi versus* is probably of Roman origin, for, although Diomedes also gives Greek names for each of his examples, Mayer asserts that they are calques from their respective Latin names and have no counterparts in similar Greek lists of unusual hexameters.[42] Furthermore, they are amply illustrated with examples from Latin verse, whereas Diomedes's list of "bad verses"[43] seems to have been wholly compiled from Greek sources: Diomedes does not even attempt to give Latin examples for them but, rather, recycles old quotations from Homer, frequently in corrupt readings.

Of Diomedes's *optimi versus*, a few have counterparts in other Latin grammarians: Diomedes's "foot-divided" line (*partipes*) is a line type that corresponds with what appears in the *Ars Palaemonis* (traditionally attributed to Victorinus) as well as Audax's *Excerpta de Scauro et Palladio* as *versus distric-*

---

[41] Mart. 2,86; Quint. *inst*. 9,4,90; Gell. 14,6,4; see also Mayer (above n. 1) 140–1.

[42] *Gramm*. I,498,23–28: *Optimi versus dena proprietate spectantur, principio ut sint inlibati iniuges aequiformes quinquipartes partipedes fistulares aequidici teretes sonores vocales. Itaque et Graeci suos nuncupant* ἀπληγεῖς ἀζυεῖς πενταμερεῖς ποδομερεῖς συρόποδες ἰσόλεκτοι κυκλοτερεῖς ἠχητικοὶ φωναστικοί. ("Verses are considered the best owing to ten characteristics, depending on whether they are intact, detached, equal-shaped, five-part, foot-divided, pipe-like, even-worded, rounded, resounding, or vocalic.") – Trans. Mayer (above n. 1) 144. Mayer's assumption that the list is of Roman origin does not, however, explain why the terms are alphabetised according to their Greek names.

[43] *Gramm*. I,498,28–30: *Sic vero hac in appellatione inprobantur ut quinque speciebus designentur: mutili exiles ecaudes fragosi fluxi; et hos* Graeci ἀκέφαλους λαγαρoὺς μειούρους τραχεῖς κογοβούς *appellant*. ("But words are condemned if they fall into five types: truncated, scanty, tailless, rough, flabby.") – Trans. Mayer (above n. 1) 145.

tus, referring to a type of line where all the word endings coincide with the ends of feet.[44] It is also discussed in Aphthonius's *De metris omnibus*, but not as a good verse type, rather as one of the worst.[45] Diomedes's "pipe-like" verse (*fistularis*), a line where each word is longer than the previous one, is mentioned by the name "rhopalic" (*rhopalicus/ropalicus*) by several antique sources, although by no means with uniform enthusiasm.[46] The few "special" hexameter lines that do appear unequivocally outside Diomedes's work demonstrate the total artificiality of his list, as both the "foot-divided" and "pipe-like" verses violate the basic principles of Latin hexameter composition, and seem to have had little impact on verse composition. Diomedes's list of "bad" verses is arguably even less useful, as it pertains to the Greek tradition of listing metrically anomalous hexameter lines, or, that is to say, lines with missing syllables or the like, rather than ones that are merely aesthetically objectionable.[47]

As one might expect from such a concoction as Diomedes's list of good and bad hexameter verses, it had little or no effect on medieval scholarship, although the Middle Ages saw the emergence of similar lists, adjusted to the evolution of medieval verse, which took into account such quintessentially medieval phenomena as rhyme. Diomedes's presentation did not become an object of serious study until the renaissance, and even then it was poorly understood.[48]

---

[44] *Gramm*. VI,214,29–215,1; *gramm*. VII,340,6–23. The two presentations are virtually identical and also form the basis for the discussions of hexameter caesurae in Aldhelm's *De metris* and Bede's *De arte metrica*; see R. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, Berlin 1919 (Monumenta Germaniae historica: auctores antiquissimi 15), 93; Kendall (above n.18) 116. Apart from Diomedes, both late antique and medieval sources emphasise that a proper hexameter line should normally have a caesura (which is absent in the "foot-divided" verse).

[45] *Gramm*. VI,71,25–9.

[46] See Gell. 14,6,4; Sacerd. *gramm*. 6,505–6; Serv. *gramm*. IV,467. "Pipe-like" or rhopalic verses are impracticable in Latin hexameter verse, as in classical and post-classical hexameters the final word is almost invariably disyllabic or trisyllabic (Greek loans being the major exception, see e.g. D. S. Raven, *Latin Metre*, London 1965, 99–100). Sacerdos confesses to being unable to find a Latin example of the verse type and takes the liberty of composing one (*quae quarum facie pulcherrima Deiopea*) by tampering with a Vergilian line (*Aen*. 1,72). However, Ausonius, who was notorious for his love of metrical trivia, composed his entire *Oratio* in rhopalic verses. Isolated cases can be found in other late antique poets; see Mayer (above n. 1) 150; L. Müller, *De re metrica poetarum latinorum praetor Plautum et Terentium*, Petersburg – Leipzig 1894, 580.

[47] Mayer (above n. 1) 145.

[48] Mayer (above n. 1) 143–4. Mayer cites such authors as Jodocus Badius Ascensius (1462 – 1535),

Persius and Diomedes's *versus teres*

That Diomedes's example of a *versus teres* (*Torva Mimalloneis inflatur tibia bombis)* is obviously a misquotation of Persius (1,99) apparently eluded Scaliger, who cited it in the form given by Diomedes.[49] The origin of the line has however, been duly noted in Keil's edition, and Mayer mentions this in passing. Mayer does not discuss the original line's context in Persius, and this is indeed striking, as, although Persius provided the model for what Diomedes deemed an *optimus versus*, his own opinion seems to have been the very opposite. Namely, the line is from a passage in Persius (1,99–102) that criticises, and mercilessly lampoons, what the poet considered the effeminate and degenerate style of the poets of his day:

> *Torva Mimalloneis implerunt cornua bombis*
> *et raptum vitulo caput ablatura superno,*
> *Bassaris et lyncem Maenas flexura corymbis*
> *euhion ingeminat, reparabilis adsonat echo.*

> [Harsh were the horns they filled with Mimallonian booms,
> and Bassarid, removing proud bull-calf's severed head,
> and Maenad, with corymbi manoeuvring a lynx,
> ingeminate Evoe; Echo chimes in, resumptive.][50]

The preceding passage[51] castigates contemporary readers who prefer such nonsense to Vergil, and, after producing his piece of parody, Persius concludes that this would not be the case if the Romans "had any balls like their ancestors did" (*testiculi vena paterni*).[52] Although the passage is over the top in its Graecistic portrayal of Bacchiac revelry, Persius's editor W. Barr, with some support from L. Morgan, contests that the only feature of Persius's parody that cannot

---

Johannes Sulpitius Verulanus, Johannes Murmellius (1480 – 1517) and last, but not least, Scaliger, but even he seems to have made little headway with Diomedes's presentation.

49 Scaliger (above n. 39) 72.

50 Trans. G. Lee, in G. Lee – W. Barr, *The Satires of Persius*, Liverpool 1987, 19.

51 Pers. 1,92–7.

52 Pers. 1,103–4.

be found in Vergil as well is the total absence of elision.[53] This, however, is arguably not an entirely accurate assessment of the deliberate accumulation of contrived stylistic features in Persius's poetic parody. Firstly, there is the golden word order of line 99, penthemimeral, "leonine" rhyme in 99 and 100 (*Mimalloneis – bombis*; *vitulo – superno*), and the "bucolic" diaeresis after the fourth foot in 99 and 102, all of which, together with the overuse of Greek names and loan words[54] and the general content of the passage call to mind Catullus 64,254–64. As Barr has stated, the passage cannot be read as a one-on-one parody of Catullus's style, as many of the archaic features that are also typical of Catullus are absent: obviously, they would not fit with Persius's complaint that the lines lack *testiculi vena paterni*.[55] It has been suggested that the verbal decadence of such poetic parody in Persius is intended to reflect its content, emphasising their air of (Eastern) sensuous overindulgence as opposed to (Roman) rigour: the passages are "too sweet" and "too rich" and are intended to justify Persius's assertions that the Romans had "emasculated the virility of their language by mixing in Greek terms".[56]

Persius's rant is quite in character with the basic ethos of the Roman satire since Lucilius. The birth of Lucilian satire has been seen as a form of cultural protest: Lucilius's employment of the hexameter, the "lofty" metre of Homer and Ennius and a relatively new import in Roman literature, in the composition of what is ultimately a mundane literary form can be interpreted as an irreverent reversal of the metre's traditional role as well as an attempt to fight the encroachment of Roman culture by foreign influences.[57] Correspondingly, the Hellenistic tradition represented by the *epyllion* of Catullus and the neoteric school,

---

[53] W. Barr, in Lee – Barr (above n. 50) 81–2; L. Morgan, *Musa Pedestris: Metre and Meaning in Roman Verse*, Oxford 2010, 329.

[54] *Mimalloneis* seems to be Persius's own invention, as it is only attested here. Only the noun *Mimallonis* has been documented before (Ov. *ars* 1,5541), and it is reasonable to expect that Persius's reader would have recognised its artificiality. Also note the (deliberately) inane pleonasm created by the synonymous *Bassaris* and *Maenas*. See R. A. Harvey, *A Commentary on Persius*, Leiden 1981, 46.

[55] Lee – Barr (above n. 40) 81–2; Catullus's free use of alliteration and coinage of compound adjectives (e.g. *raucisonus* at Catull. 64,263) are conspicuously absent from Persius's parody.

[56] Pers. 1,95; S. Bartsch, *Persius: A Study in Food, Philosophy, and the Figural*, Chicago – London 2015, 159–60. Bartsch cites the scholiast *ad* 1,95.

[57] See Morgan (above n. 53) 310–6.

together with bucolic poetry, must be considered the aesthetic and ideological opposite of Lucilian satire. When he affected a poetic style that approximated some features of spoken Latin in contrast to the studied artfulness of the hexameter epic, Lucilius prided himself in having "thrown speech into verse".[58] Obviously, this had elements of inverted snobbery, and even Lucilius acknowledged that it was something of an effort: if anything, Roman satirists were the opposite of Molière's *bourgeois gentilhomme* who was unaware that he spoke in prose.

One hallmark of satirical style was its free use of elision, which is acknowledged to have been a feature of spoken Latin but the use of which had already been limited by Ennius, particularly in his epic.[59] Although the accomplished – and generous – use of elision is generally considered a central feature of Vergil's verse, this is probably an innovation inspired by satire: by infusing the style of his *Aeneid* with certain features of the Roman satire, he made it more rugged and "Roman".[60] The exaggerated smoothness of Persius's verse parody is partly due to its total absence of elision, and as this constitutes its most marked difference not only to the usual style of satire but also that of Vergilian epic, it is obviously one of the most pronounced metrical features that are attacked in Persius's caricature. Persius's most apparent target, as far as the content of his piecce is concerned, is the bucolic verse of the Silver Age, and statistically, they also exhibit strikingly infrequent use of elision, in particular the Neronian Calpurnius Siculus.[61]

---

[58] Cf. Lucilius's famous description of his verse paraphrase of the auctioneer Granius's wit at lines 448–9 W: *conicere in versus dictum praeconis volebam / Grani*. ("I wanted to throw into verse the speech of the auctioneer Granius").

[59] Elision in Ennius's *Annals* is very rare indeed, occurring only in 19% of the lines, which is below average for Latin hexameter verse. In the fragments of Ennius's *Hedyphagetica*, elision is twice as common. Although it is plausible that this is simply due to its early date, it may equally well be due to its lighter, non-epic content. See J. Soubiran, *L'Élision dans la poésie latine,* Paris 1966, 607; O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Q. Ennius*, Oxford 1985, 3–4 and 52–3.

[60] Vergil's use of elision in his Aeneid (in 53.31% of the lines) is unparalleled by any other Roman hexameter poet. The difference to his earlier Eclogues (27.23%) is striking. See L. Ceccarelli, *Contributi per la storia dell'esametro Latino*, vol. II (Rome, 2008), 104. For Vergil's motives, see N.-O. Nilsson, *Metrische Stildifferenzen in den Satiren des Horaz*, Uppsala 1952, 8–10; F. Jones, "Juvenal and the Hexameter", in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XIV*, Brussels 2007, 348–64, at 361–2; Morgan (above n. 53) 329.

[61]   In the *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus, elision is virtually non-existent, occurring in only about 1.72%. In his avoidance of elision, Calpurnius comes second only to the *Laus Pisonis* (at

    If we compare Mayer's statistics on the golden line with the data on eli-
sion we have from Soubiran and Ceccarelli,[62] we can see that the frequency of
the golden line in classical and Silver Latin seems to have almost an inverse
correlation to the frequency of elision: if the latter was a hallmark of "Roman-
ness", most eagerly embraced by satirists and the emulators of Vergilian epic,
the golden line was associated with the excessively smooth, "Greek" style of the
neoterics and their acolytes. Apart from Vergil's idiosyncratically high ratio of
elision, one end of this spectrum is, unsurprisingly, satire, which is characterised
by frequent elision as well as the conspicuous absence of golden lines.[63] The
other extreme would, obviously, be bucolic verse. Although Mayer's data on the
genre is limited to Vergil's *Eclogues*, the appearance of the golden line in Persi-
us's mock-bucolic sample would lead us to expect that we might also expect the
device to be typical not only of Catullus and Vergil's *Eclogues*, but also Silver
Latin bucolic poetry. It has, indeed, been noted by some writers that Calpurnius
Siculus favours a strict golden word order,[64] but, unfortunately, Mayer has not
included him in his statistics. I have therefore taken the liberty of analysing Cal-
purnius's *Eclogues* with Mayer's criteria, with the purposes of gaining figures
that are compatible with his findings. And, indeed, the following statistics would
seem to confirm this hypothesis:

0.77%), which, however, has also been attributed to Calpurnius; see Ceccarelli (above n. 50) 105.
Interestingly, the frequency of golden lines in the *Laus* is also an incredibly high 6.13%; see Mayer
(above n. 1) 161.

[62] Mayer (above n. 1) 161; Soubiran (above n. 59); Ceccarelli (above n. 60).

[63] According to Mayer, Persius has 0.92% golden and 0.92% silver lines in his *Satires*. Mayer
gives no figures for Juvenal, but, according to my observation, his first five *Satires* have fourteen
golden lines and a single silver line (1.41% and 0.20% respectively). Although marginally higher
than Persius's, the figure is probably inflated by parody, as in the deliberately effeminate 2,91 (*talia
secreta coluerunt orgia taeda*) or the fishmonger Crispinus's words to Domitian on presenting him
with a turbot at 4,68 (*et tua seruatum consume in saecula rhombum*) in "sentiments that are high-
flown and redolent of the return of the Golden Age." See Juvenal, *The Satires*, ed. and trans. J.
Ferguson, London 1979, 165.

[64] See, e.g., N. W. Slater, "Calpurnius and the Anxiety of Vergilian Influence", *SyllClass* 5 (1994)
71–8; F. N. Antolín (ed.), *Lygdamus: Corpus Tibullianum III.1 – 6: Lygdami Elegiarum Liber*,
Leiden 1996, 201–2.

	Verses	Gold	Silver	%G	%S	%G+S
Calp. *ecl*. 1	94	8	1	8.51%	1.06%	9.57%
Calp. *ecl*. 2	100	8	3	8.00%	3.00%	11.00%
Calp. *ecl*. 3	98	3	0	3.06%	0.00%	3.06%
Calp. *ecl*. 4	169	7	0	4.14%	0.00%	4.14%
Calp. *ecl*. 5	120	5	1	4.17%	0.83%	5.00%
Calp. *ecl*. 6	92	2	0	2.17%	0.00%	2.17%
Calp. *ecl*. 7	84	4	0	4.76%	0.00%	4.76%
Total	757	37	5	4.89%	0.66%	5.55%

At 4.89 per cent, the frequency of golden lines in Calpurnius's *Eclogues* is conspicuously high, surpassing even Catullus and Sedulius, although still dwarfed by Ennodius and Aldhelm. One can also observe that the frequency of golden lines is the highest in the first two *Eclogues*, with a subsequent drop (although there is a minor surge in the last *Eclogue*). This observation seems consistent with what we know about the use of golden word order in the work of poets who favoured the technique: they seem prone to invest most of their effort in the opening of a poem, with a subsequent decline in its frequency.[65] Possibly apart from the second eclogue, there does not seem to be a similar attempt to cultivate silver lines.[66] In this respect, Calpurnius's technique seems closer to the poets of late antiquity than that of Catullus. Calpurnius's use of the golden line seems deliberate and studied, an overall effect that is, if anything, underscored by his enhanced use of the device in the beginning of the work where he clearly strives to impress his reader. We can assume with some safety that the golden line constituted a feature of his poetic style, and of the genre he represented, that his contemporaries found conspicuous enough for parody.

As other surviving examples of Roman bucolic verse are, admittedly, fairly scant, it may be illustrative also to present my statistics on the *Eclogues* of the third-century Nemesianus.

---

[65] See Wright (above n. 27) 74–6 (on Sedulius and the *Hisperica Famina*); Orchard (above n. 27) 95–6 (on Aldhelm); Mayer (above n. 1) 163 (especially on the medieval Walther of Speyer).

[66] This does not, of course, mean that they are not used deliberately where they do appear, as in Calp. *ecl*. 2,81, **mille** *renidenti dabimus tibi* cortice **Chias** ("I shall give you a thousand Chian figs with shining skin"). However weak a joke this may seem to the modern reader, I find it plausible that the author tried to pun on the phonetic association of chiasmus and *Chias*.

	Verses	Gold	Silver	%G	%S	%G+S
Nemes. *ecl*. 1	87	1	0	1.15%	0.00%	1.15%
Nemes. *ecl*. 2	90	2	0	2.22%	0.00%	2.22%
Nemes. *ecl*. 3	69	2	2	2.90%	2.90%	5.80%
Nemes. *ecl*. 4	73	2	1	2.74%	1.37%	4.11%
Total	319	7	3	2.19%	0.94%	3.13%

As we can see, Nemesianus's use of golden lines is reasonably moderate, although well above the classical average; on the other hand, his use of silver lines is more generous. Of course, Nemesianus postdates both Persius and Calpurnius, his probable target, considerably, and personal stylistic differences are not necessarily always attributable to stylistic conventions. One must also remember that, by Nemesianus's time, golden word order had probably come to be perceived as something closer to a "standard" technique, rather than a primarily bucolic mannerism.

Conclusion

Contrary to what Mayer seems to imply, it seems that the golden line was recognised as a stylistic feature already in the classical period. However, it was not one that was universally admired, being in essence a genre-specific feature associated with bucolic verse and – correspondingly – denigrated as such by Persius. Its increasing popularity in the late imperial period and beyond has been attributed to a role it had gained in the instruction of verse composition in the imperial schools.[67] Although plausible, this development is, unfortunately, poorly documented. Prior to Bede, we have little to go on except the obvious increase in its use by several poets and one oblique statement in Diomedes's obscure and often erroneous presentation of "special" hexameter verses. What seems certain, however, is that, in the late imperial period, its bucolic associations ultimately disappeared, which probably accounts for the fact that what Persius intended as an example of contrived and effeminate verse wound up as

---

[67] Mayer (above n. 1) 163: "The golden line may have been taught in the schools as a quick way to elegance, which poets used with increased moderation as their experience grew."

an example of metrical elegance in Dionysius' treatise. We know that grammarians were rarely astute when it came to intertextuality or genre parody,[68] but I also find it plausible that Diomedes did not necessarily known the line's origin, and that he was merely citing a well-circulated (mis)quotation employed in the teaching of verse technique.

Structurally, the double hyperbaton of the golden line was virtually the opposite of the loose and quasi-prosaic diction of Roman satire. Being over-elaborate and excessively smooth, its stood for all that was inimical to the ethos of Lucilian's followers. Its use also frequently resulted in rhyme between the two halves of the line, a feature that contributed to its air as something contrived and "kitchy". Tellingly, in Persius's bucolic parody, not only the golden line at 1,99 (*torva Mimalloneis implerunt cornua bombis*) but also the following one (*et raptum vitulo caput ablatura superno*) have rhyme.

Another contestable feature of golden word order is that it effectively produces lines that are syntactically self-contained. The paucity of golden lines in Vergil's *Aeneid* is probably at least partly due to its ambitious enjambment of verses.[69] Aldhelm's overuse of golden word order has been associated with his generally short-winded and end-stopped style, where clauses rarely extend beyond their endings;[70] a feature that Bede probably tried to counteract by commending both enjambment and hyperbata in his discussion of poetic style.[71]

---

[68] Cf. the claims, based on Horace's *ridiculus mus* (*ars* 139), according to which verse-final monosyllables are particularly suited for the portrayal of small animals in Quintilian (*inst*. 8,3,18–20) and Servius on Verg. *Aen*. 8,83 that do not even take into account the possibility of parody. See J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le monosyllable dans l'hexamètre latin: essai de métrique verbale,* Paris 1964, 64; C. Galboli, "On Horace's Ars Poetica 139: Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus", in L. Sawicki – D. Shalev (eds.), *Donum grammaticum: Studies in Latin and Celtic Linguistics in Honour of Hannah Rosén*, Leuven 2002, 65–76, at 65–6.

[69] Cf. Winbolt's observations on Vergil's use of "nearly golden" lines; Winbolt (above n. 5) 222–3.

[70] See Orchard (above n. 27) 96–7.

[71] Bede's verse technique in his hagiographical *Vita Metrica Sancti Cuthberti* (ed. W. Jaager, Leipzig 1935) demonstrates that he effectively fused the principles of enjambment and golden word order, usually by transposing the predicate verb into the beginning of the following line, a technique not dissimilar from Vergil's "nearly golden lines". That Bede does not discuss the placement of the verb in golden lines may reflect his looser application of the device. See Wright (above n. 27) 163–6; Heikkinen (above n. 22) 89.

Diomedes, or his source, on the other hand, seems to have noted this feature of the golden line with approval, lauding its *cohaerens dictio*.

To recapitulate: although far from being the pinnacle of "Golden Latin artistry", as Wilkinson understood it, the golden line seems to have been recognised as a stylistic device already in the Late Republican and Augustan periods, at least sufficiently so to merit being parodied by Persius. In its purest form, however, it was a feature that seems to have been understood as particularly typical of bucolic poetry, as opposed to Vergilian epic or satire. This distinction became meaningless in subsequent centuries, which saw the golden line's unprecedented proliferation, probably through the influence of Sedulius and his Insular admirers. It is this development that earned it the place it enjoys today in classical academia.

University of Helsinki