The Literary Artistry of Terentianus Maurus*

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ABSTRACT

Terentianus Maurus, a North African writing probably in the third century A.D.*, bequeathed to posterity a preface and three polymetric poems:* De litteris, De syllabis *and* De metris. *The poems' titles reflect their content, the first two covering the pronunciation of letters and syllables and the third discussing the details of a bewildering array of metres. Unpromising subject matter for poetry? On the contrary. Terentianus Maurus uses this raw material to display his extraordinary poetic skill, while also conveying useful technical information. This paper first examines the programmatic preface to his poems, which is studded with intertextual gems and shines with every kind of literary polish. It then turns to look at passages from the rest of Terentianus' poetry to see how he puts the ideals of his preface into poetic practice. The paper aims to show that Terentianus Maurus is not, or not just, a grammarian, but rather a consummate literary artist in the tradition of learned didactic verse.*

Keywords: Terentianus Maurus; didactic poetry; intertextuality; wordplay; metre; grammar

I INTRODUCTION

Even among professional Latinists, Terentianus Maurus is hardly a household name.[1] Author of poems *De litteris*, *De syllabis* and *De metris*, he is known as a grammarian today, and only read — or rather raided — by those in search of recondite philological information. Who would do otherwise with a text buried deep inside Heinrich Keil's monumental *Grammatici Latini*? But a glance at Terentianus' text might cause you to wonder whether he really belongs in this company. In the thousands of pages of Keil's eight learned and laborious volumes, Terentianus Maurus is the sole author of a text in verse.[2] And if you actually read that text, you will realise that Terentianus is not just the author of a text in verse — he is a consummate literary artist who crafted polished and

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[1] Terentianus receives a scant two sentences, for example, in the *OCD*. But this is better treatment than that afforded by a recent Latin literary history, where Terentianus' name is given as *Terentius* Maurus (and his work is dismissed as 'far from agreeable to read': Conte 1999: 611). The best introduction to Terentianus in English is Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 72–81 (including translated extracts); Cignolo 2002 is a text, translation, and commentary on the whole; Beck 1993a likewise on *De syllabis*.

[2] Indeed, his is the first extant 'verse grammar' of any sort until the eighth century: see Law 1999 (a survey of known Latin verse grammars through the fifteenth century).

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elegant poetry. We have thus made an error of generic classification and condemned Terentianus to an unjust neglect by literary scholars. Wrongly relegated to the Sahara Desert of the *Grammatici Latini*, Terentianus deserves to be recalled into the company of learned didactic poets writing in the Alexandrian tradition.

Since fate has rendered Terentianus obscure today — as he himself wrote, 'habent sua fata libelli' (1286)[3] — I will begin by introducing the man and what we can surmise about his literary context. The known facts about his life are few. He mentions in passing that he is North African ('Maurus', 1971), and Augustine, perhaps with a touch of patriotic pride, confirms this origin (Aug., *util. cred.* 7.17). His date is uncertain, but the mid- to late third century at least suits the available evidence.[4] The latest author he quotes — with apparent affection and a tantalising *nuper* — is Septimius Serenus ('dulcia Septimius qui scripsit opuscula nuper', 'Septimius, who recently wrote his delightful *Opuscula*', 1891).[5] Unfortunately, we do not know exactly who Septimius Serenus was or when he flourished.[6] We can, however, say that he is later than the poet Alfius Avitus ('ut pridem Alfius Auitus', 'as Alfius Avitus [wrote] some time ago', 2448). And it is very tempting to identify this Alfius Avitus with P. Alfius Avitus Numerius (*CIL* II 4110 = *ILS* 2931), and further to make this man the boy who performed in a choir for Septimius Severus in 204 (*AE* 1932 no. 70) and the eventual governor of Lower Pannonia at some point between 244 and 247 (*CIL* III 10436).[7] If this admittedly fragile chain of reasoning is correct, then Serenus will have flourished in the mid-third century, placing Terentianus soon thereafter. We can in any event be sure that Terentianus' works were in circulation by the middle of the fourth century, since he is used by Apthonius (aka Asmonius), who dedicated a grammatical treatise to Constantius.[8]

Terentianus bequeathed to posterity a preface and three polymetric poems: *De litteris*, *De syllabis* and *De metris* (this last incomplete). The poems' titles reflect their content. *De litteris* treats the pronunciation of individual Latin letters, *De syllabis* the pronunciation of syllables, with special focus on points of difficulty, and *De metris* the rules and origins of a bewildering array of Latin poetic metres. Terentianus is also a metrical magician: his preface is in glyconics (Ter. Maur. 1–84), *De litteris* in sotadeans (85–278), *De syllabis* in trochaic tetrameters (279–998) and dactylic hexameters (999–1299), and *De metris* (1300–2981) in literally scores of different metres — because in *De metris* he describes the individual metres he discusses *in* those very metres.[9] Such a

[3] His only famous line — almost invariably, as here, quoted only partially: see Beck 1993a: 518–20, who shows that the half-line's use as a proverb dates only from the Renaissance.

[4] Scholars have traditionally preferred to date him to the late second or early third century because of his affection for the so-called *poetae nouelli* and the belief that those poets were second-century in date (so Beck 1993a: 10; Cignolo 2002: xxv–xxvii; Zetzel 2018: 324). It seems doubtful that the *poetae nouelli* constituted any kind of 'school' (Cameron 1980; Courtney 2003: 373), but in any case some of the '*nouelli*' whom Terentianus quotes probably belong to the third century (see below). Beck 1994 argues for a late third- or early fourth-century date (on dubious grounds: cf. Cignolo 2002: xxvi).

[5] *Pace* Beck 1994: 221–3, even in contrast to the 'ueteres … poetas' in the preceding line ('qui multos legere, negant hoc corpore metri | Romanos aliquid ueteres scripsisse poetas', 1889–90), *nuper* is most naturally taken as 'recently'. *Opuscula* is the title of Serenus' poetry collection: Non. 865.19 L; cf. Ter. Maur. 1975.

[6] Champlin 1981 tried to identify the poet Septimius Serenus with Serenus Sammonicus, an antiquarian executed on the order of Caracalla at the very end of 211 or beginning of 212; for obstacles to this identification, see Courtney 2003: 406. A tenth-century manuscript catalogue from Bobbio (Manitius 1935: 156) makes Septimius Serenus the L. Septimius who translated into Latin the *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* of Dictys Cretensis.

[7] Discussion in Cameron 1980: 145; Courtney 2003: 403; Hächler 2019: 260–1.

[8] *GL* II 215.6: 'Asmonius in arte, quam ad Constantium imperatorem scribit' – probably (but not certainly) Constantius II (A.D. 337–361) rather than Constantius I (A.D. 305–306); see Kaster 1988: 245–6. On the spelling 'Apthonius' vs 'Asmonius', see Zetzel 2018: 186, 280.

[9] 'Metrical magician' is the sobriquet given by Geer 1933. The precise number of verse forms that Terentianus Maurus uses depends on how you categorise various metres, but it is *c.* 50 (table by metre in Beck 1993b: 273–4; by line number in Beck 1993b: 275–6 and Cignolo 2002: 605–11).

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verse virtuoso already looks much more like a poet than like your typical author of a metrical treatise.

There is some controversy over whether all three of Terentianus' poems were published together, and further controversy over whether the preface was meant to introduce all three works or only some.[10] But Chiara Cignolo has well argued that the three poems, whatever their original order of composition, form a unity arranged in the traditional order of phonetics, prosody and metrics, to which the preface was attached as an introduction to the collected whole.[11] This will be my working assumption in this paper, although most of my arguments work equally well even without a Grand Unified Authorial Design, as the poems were certainly all written by a single author with a consistent set of poetic principles.

What did Terentianus Maurus do besides write these poems? All we know is what he tells us in his preface. He claims that he has turned to this narrow genre in his old age, no longer able 'dicere grandia' ('to speak on grand themes', 53). Some have thought that this phrase could indicate a past career as an orator, but given the poetic sophistication of his extant work, it seems overwhelmingly more likely that Terentianus' *grandia* were in fact poems in 'higher' genres.[12] And we do have a single fragment, preserved in Servius (ad *Aen*. 8.96), of a poem in iambic dimeters attributed to one *Terrentianus*.[13] Whatever he had been before, however, he was certainly no professional grammarian or schoolteacher. In the first instance, he addresses this work to his son Bassinus and his son-in-law Novatus, a sure sign of the gentleman amateur.[14] Furthermore, in his treatment of technical points, he often varies from the ordinary explanations of the grammatical tradition; he speaks instead from his own experience.[15] Finally, throughout his poetry he takes pains to distance himself from the *grammatici* and *magistri* (e.g. 1354–5, 'latius tractant magistri … | nos uiam metri studemus parte ab aliqua pandere', 'the schoolteachers treat [this] at greater length … we are [just] trying to open up the path to meter to some degree').[16]

Terentianus Maurus was thus a practising poet, and he was writing a didactic poem about poetry, directed at least notionally to other poets and aspiring poets. He is following not so much in the footsteps of the *grammatici* as those of Horace in the *Ars poetica*, one of his most important models.[17] Terentianus' aspiring poets would not have been schoolchildren; this material and its presentation are again too sophisticated for such an audience. His two named addressees, Bassinus and Novatus, are adults.[18]

[10] Beck 1993a: 565–75; Beck 1998: 3216–17 thinks *De syllabis* was at least composed later; Sallmann 1997: 620 contends without evidence that the order of composition was *De litteris*, *De syllabis* and *De metris*, and further that *De metris* was 'sicher postum publiziert'.
[11] Cignolo 2002: xxxvii–xli, 237–8; Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 75 n. 13 (Beck 1998: 3216 also allows this as a possibility).
[12] Beck 1993a: 9 and Cignolo 2002: xxviii–xxix, 234 allow for a previous career as either an orator or a poet; Beck 1998: 3215 plumps for poet.
[13] 'Presumably Terentianus Maurus': Courtney 2003: 423; likewise Blänsdorf 2011: 374.
[14] See Kaster 1988: 66–8 (68: 'though amateur litterateurs dedicated their works to … sons, no professional grammarian we know in late antiquity dedicated a work to his own son').
[15] See Beck 1993a: 556–64.
[16] So too 214, 'grammatici uolunt', and phrases like 'iubent/dicunt/tradunt magistri' (175, 380, 404; further 2255): these examples collected by Beck 1993a: 562, to which add 779, 1386, 1703–4, 1807, 2348, 2768.
[17] And he has very little in common with the later tradition of Latin verse grammars, often used in the Middle Ages for material that defies logical organisation (Law 1999); Terentianus' *dispositio* is actually very clear throughout. The *Ars poetica* seems likely to have been the last work of Horace's career too (Rimell 2019: 119–20; admittedly unprovable: Brink 1963–1982: I 239–43).
[18] They are sons of a professed old man and assumed to have the critical sophistication to correct his work (see Section III below). Nothing further is known about Bassinus and Novatus, although both names are well attested in inscriptions, including in Africa (Bassinus: see e.g. *TLL Onom*. II 1781.14–30; Novatus: e.g. *CIL* VIII 7448, 8634 [= *RE* s.v. *Novatus* 2, fifth-century bishop of Mauretania Sitifensis], 18981, 19932; *AE* 1967 no. 644 = 1971 no. 515; *ILAlg*. II 1.2308, 2309, 2363, 2793; Kajanto 1965: 353).

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Moreover, he demands a careful and conscientious reader who will take time and work hard in order to appreciate his subtle art (see Section IV, Conclusion). Terentianus' poetry is thus constantly working on multiple levels: on one he is providing instruction to potential poets on how to write, say, a well-formed pentameter, while on another he is himself exemplifying his poetic precepts in his own poem, complete with careful language and allusions and even, in *De metris*, by writing in the very metres on which he is giving instruction. There is throughout a delicate interplay of these levels, of form and content, and this interplay is a large part of how Terentianus constructs his poetic authority and a large part of his literary artistry.

You might ask why Terentianus would write such a poem. He gives us one answer in his preface, which we will turn to in Section II, but a look at the broader context of his life and times is also suggestive. An African living in the third century would have been surrounded by Latin speakers uncertain about pronunciation and, especially, vowel quantities. While such confusion may have been widespread in the contemporary Roman Empire, in our sources it is particularly associated with North Africa — the grammarian Consentius calls it the 'African vice' (*GL* V 392.3) — and evidence from inscriptions and poetry bears this out.[19] And there was a lot of African poetry: Africa boasts more published Latin verse inscriptions than any other province.[20] For a literary example, consider only Commodianus, an African Christian probably dating to the third century, whose poems are much more famous for their quantities than their quality.[21] Terentianus' own 'sure-footed' quantities, by contrast, are a point of particular pride (79–80), and his poetic canon — at least insofar as we can judge from the authors whom he quotes — is firmly rooted in the classical tradition, Vergil and Horace above all.[22] And so with the linguistic ground shifting under his feet, Terentianus may have written his poems in part as a revanchist project, trying to regain lost territory of Latin pronunciation and classical versification.

In late antiquity Terentianus seems to have had a good reputation. Augustine praises one of his verses in passing ('elegantissimo uersiculo', 'a most elegant little verse', *De ciu. D.* 6.2), and Sidonius Apollinaris coins the marvellous phrase *centimeter Terentianus*, while placing him in the company of a number of famous Latin poets (*Carm.* 9.264). Prudentius may have known his work.[23] But already he seems to have been passing into the grammatical tradition, where he is used as a source and widely quoted.[24] Such recycling and abridgement of his poetry into more practical form may have contributed to his eventual near extinction. He disappears from view in the Middle Ages, surviving to the Renaissance in a single manuscript, which was rediscovered in 1493 and then vanished after the text was set in type in 1497.[25]

[19] On African pronunciation of Latin and confusion of vowel quantities, see esp. Adams 2007: 260–5; 2013: 43–51; on the collapse of distinction in vowel quantity in Latin more generally, see Probert 2019: 171–86 with further references.

[20] Baldwin 1989: 331.

[21] An unfair reputation (see Baldwin 1989 for a detailed defense of Commodianus' literary merits, as well as discussion of his dating and related issues), but the fact remains that Commodianus' vowel quantities and versification are decidedly non-classical.

[22] See Beck 1993b: 265–7; Cignolo 2002: 616–17, where Vergil and Horace are far and away the most quoted Latin authors. But this observation should not be pressed too hard: Terentianus' quotations are in large part determined by metrical needs, which may lead to an overrepresentation of the '*poetae nouelli*' (on whom see n. 4 above), who wrote in exotic metres, and a dearth of citations of, say, elegiac poets (note that only the polymetric poems of Catullus are quoted).

[23] Morelli 2012.

[24] He is used or quoted by Augustine (*De musica*), Bede, Cledonius, Consentius, Diomedes, Iulianus of Toledo, Lactantius Placidus, Mallius Theodorus, Martianus Capella, Maximus Victorinus, Pompeius, Priscian, Rufinus, Sergius and Servius (Beck 1998: 3209 n. 3). Testimonia and discussion in Trezza 1923: 119–23; Beck 1993a: 10–11.

[25] On the text and transmission, see Beck 1993a: 32–43; Cignolo 2002: xlv–lv. On the lost Bobbio manuscript more generally, see exhaustively Morelli 2011–12: I xcii–clxviii.

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Since the age of print, Terentianus has scarcely been read, despite the apparent admiration of some of his early editors.[26] And even his few admirers seem deaf to his poetry: Jan-Wilhelm Beck, perhaps the most resolute champion Terentianus has ever found, can say that 'despite writing in verse, Terentianus has no poetic pretensions and in none of his three works does he pursue poetic goals'.[27] When Terentianus has been read, he has been merely a quarry for information.[28] Now he is a good quarry, to be sure, but his work offers much more than material for the collector of grammatical curiosities.

Augustine once said, 'If you haven't studied the art of poetry, you wouldn't dare to read Terentianus Maurus without a teacher' ('nulla imbutus poetica disciplina Terentianum Maurum sine magistro attingere non auderes', *util. cred.* 7.17). Whether I am sufficiently instructed in the art of poetry or not, in the rest of this paper I will dare to read Terentianus Maurus, and dare to read him as a literary artist, with attention to his allusions and language and metre and the constant interplay in his text between form and content. I will first examine the preface to his poems (1–84), which is studded with intertextual gems and shines with every kind of literary polish. It thematises a poetics of both small-scale elegance and *labor*, and constitutes a self-conscious declaration of allegiance to the Hellenistic tradition of learned didactic verse. Then I will look at passages from the rest of Terentianus' poetry to show how he puts the programmatic ideals of his preface to work in poetic practice. Terentianus Maurus is not a grammarian, or, if writing about grammar *ipso facto* makes a grammarian, he is not 'just' a grammarian: he is a poet. And his poetry is not just a versified compendium of technical lore: it is a work of literary artistry in the tradition of Alexandrian didactic.

II TERENTIANUS MAURUS' PREFACE (1–84)

In the preface to his poems, Terentianus Maurus inserts himself into a long intertextual tradition of didactic poetry, and does so with flair and panache.[29] It is ostensibly a *recusatio*, as Terentianus claims that he is too old to write poetry on lofty themes ('grandia', 52) and so has chosen a humbler subject instead ('exile negotium', 63). But he is very keen to emphasise that this does not mean that his task is easy: throughout his preface he juxtaposes the small size and scope of his poems with the immense *labor* required to create them. The centrepiece of the preface is an elaborate simile, a comparison of himself and his poetry with a retired Olympic athlete and the small-scale exercise that he is said to have devised for himself. The whole thing constitutes a brilliant blend of self-deprecation and boasting, shot through with metapoetic commentary.

[26] Their self-interested puffs are collected by Trezza 1923: 123–30 and excerpted by Beck 1998: 3208–9. So the preface of the *editio princeps* states: 'nihil in hoc genere aut eruditius aut exquisitius latinis litteris proditum'. The hallmark of all this marketing copy is its vagueness (e.g. 'disertus doctusque' or 'opus elegans').

[27] Beck 1998: 3217: 'trotz der Versform erhebt Terentianus keine dichterischen Ansprüche und verfolgt für keine der drei Schriften poetische Ziele'. More detailed denigration of Terentianus as poet in Beck 1993a: 534–8; cf. further e.g. Beck 2003: 385.

[28] So, for example, he is often quoted by Allen 1978 as evidence for the pronunciation of Latin, and he is the focus of Amacker 1996 on Greek and Latin diphthongs. He is probably also the source of Richard Bentley's apparently brilliant rediscovery of the law of synaphea in anapaestic systems announced in the *Epistola ad Joannem Millium* of 1691 (reprinted in Bentley 1836: 273–4), as alleged by Richard Dawes a half-century later (Dawes 1745: 29–30; cf. Ter. Maur. 1517, 'anapaestica fiunt itidem per συνάφειαν'); Bentley had certainly read Terentianus by the time he edited Horace (see e.g. Bentley 1711: I 22, 119, 198, 407, 460). Terentianus is also occasionally mentioned as preserving bits and bobs of literary history: for example, he is the first extant author to quote Petronius, and the first to identify him unambiguously as *Arbiter* (2489, 2852).

[29] Beck 1993a: 534–8 questions whether Terentianus should be classified as a 'didactic' poet, essentially on the grounds that his project is not literary enough (likewise Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 72). As I will show, Terentianus is very literary indeed — but even if he were not, these would be dubious boundaries to impose on the didactic genre; cf. e.g. Venuti 2019a on the breadth of didactic in Late Antiquity.

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Terentianus begins with the tale of the Olympic athlete, including in his first lines a programmatic double allusion (1–14):

audiui ueterem uirum
uulgo dicere fabulam,
quendam, **qui** ter **Olympia**
uicisset, Ioue praeside,
5 postquam accedere liuidum
uirtuti **senium** uidet,
dum uictor cluet omnium,
maturasse resoluere
legem pulueris et cibi,
10 sed ne corpoream repens
labem accerseret otium,
tale exercitii genus
commentum sibi dixerat,
quod solus gereret domi.

I heard an old man often tell this story: a certain athlete, **who** under the aegis of Zeus had three times **won at the Olympic games**, saw spiteful **old age** encroaching on his strength. While he still enjoyed the reputation of triumphing over everyone, he **hastened to put an end** to his competitive regime of diet and exercise. But so that this sudden relaxation wouldn't bring about the ruin of his body, he claimed he'd come up with the following sort of exercise to practise by himself at home.

Terentianus here alludes to two famous Latin predecessors.[30] First, Ennius (*Ann.* 522–3 Sk. [= Cic., *Sen.* 14]):

sicuti fortis equos spatio **qui** saepe supremo
uicit Olympia nunc **senio** confectus quiescit

Just as a powerful horse **who has** often **won** in the last lap **at the Olympic games** now, done in by **old age**, enjoys a quiet retirement

We do not know how Ennius' fragment continues, but Cicero, the quoting author, tells us explicitly that Ennius is comparing himself to the retired Olympic horse; Ennius is making his own *recusatio*.[31] So too Horace, in the first epistle of his first book of *Epistles*, tells Maecenas that he is too old to be drawn back into writing lyric poetry (*Epist.* 1.18–19):

solue senescentem **mature** sanus equum, ne
peccet ad extremum ridendus et ilia ducat.

Give the ageing horse **his freedom in good time**, if you've got any sense, so that he doesn't wheeze and stumble at the end, an object of ridicule.

In his own *recusatio*, Terentianus has picked up on both the general image of a retired Olympic victor and the specific language of Ennius ('qui ... Olympia uicisset' ~ 'qui ... uicit Olympia', 'senium' ~ 'senio') and Horace ('maturasse' ~ 'mature', 'resoluere' ~ 'solue').[32] His small variations from Ennius within his allusion — 'ter' ~ 'saepe', 'Ioue

[30] These allusions are documented but not discussed by Cignolo 2002: 218–19, 220–1 *ad loc.* (likewise Cignolo 2000: 236–7); brief interpretive comments in Sluiter and Schenkeveld 2018: 259.
[31] For speculation about possible contexts, see Skutsch 1985: 673–4; Elliott 2013: 123–4.
[32] Terentianus' 'dum uictor cluet omnium' in the middle of this allusion could also have an Ennian flavor (cf. *Ann.* 12–13 Sk., 'latos <per> populos res atque poemata nostra | <... clara> cluebunt' [codd. *-bant*]; Lucr. 1.117–19), but it must be admitted that the phrase seems more generally archaic and even, with *uictor*, formulaic: cf. Plaut., *Trin.* 309, 'dum uiuit uictor uictorum cluet' (likewise *Amph.* 647, 'ut meus uictor uir belli clueat').

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praeside' ~ 'spatio ... supremo' — even manage to maintain the same grammatical structure (temporal adverb and ablative of attendant circumstances).

Furthermore, Terentianus has perhaps underscored his *re*petition of Horace with *resoluere*.[33] And this might not be the only metapoetic gesture: the very first word of the poem, *audiui*, looks like an 'Alexandrian footnote', a device, as James Townshend has neatly put it, 'designed to draw attention precisely to the allusive content of an utterance — to the fact that the material belongs to an earlier tradition, or even a plurality of competing traditions'.[34] If this is the case, then even the poem's second word, *ueterem*, may point to the venerable antiquity of the tradition, which in fact stretches beyond Horace and Ennius back to a fragment of Ibycus (fr. 6.4–7 P.).[35] Terentianus also improves on his poetic predecessors: he has replaced the horse of Ennius and Horace with an ageing athlete, allowing for a perfect parallel between his poetic retirement activities and those of the quondam Olympic victor.[36] Indeed, Terentianus' retired athlete is the very embodiment of the common claim of a Latin poet in a *recusatio* that their strength (*uires*) is insufficient for a grand undertaking.[37] In sum, in the first few lines of his poem, Terentianus Maurus fully enters into the allusive tradition of poetic *recusationes*, signalling to the reader that he is a poet with literary chops bent on *imitatio* and *aemulatio*.

Terentianus continues by describing the retired athlete's home exercise programme (15–35):

15 **neruis mollibus inuicem**
iunctis in **teretem** struem,
ceu Parthus solet aut Scythes
arcus cornibus **extimis**
leuem nectere lineam,
20 tales assidue **ligat,**
dum sit **funiculi** modus,
aptus qui puteo foret.
haustos hinc igitur **cados**
imis ab tenebris aquae
25 **tam filo tenui** trahens,
quod stringi nequeat uola,
nisus undique corporis
summos in digitos agit;
angustoque tenaculo
30 donec lubrica sarcina
tanti per spatium caui
in lucem superam exeat,
alterna uice pollicum
certat uincere ponderis
35 in praeceps facilem fugam.

[33] For similar metapoetic uses of the *re-* prefix, cf. e.g. Verg., *Aen.* 3.690, 'relegens errata retrorsus' (Achaemenides *re*tracing his wanderings in reverse, Vergil *re*reading and *re*writing Homer); Petr. 89.57, 'Danai relaxant claustra' ~ Verg., *Aen.* 2.259, 'laxat claustra Sinon'; Val. Fl. 5.431–2, 'recolligit ... formidantem patrios Pyroenta dolores' ~ Ov., *Met.* 2.398–9, 'colligit amentes et adhuc terrores pauentes | Phoebus equos' (with Keith 2019: 336).

[34] Townshend 2015: 77, with bibliography of earlier discussion of the term in n. 1; see esp. Hinds 1998: 1–5, noting the polemical edge of many of these poetic references: they surpass their sources, as Terentianus will do.

[35] On some other possible branches of this tradition, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1959: III 33–4.

[36] Similarly observed by Sluiter and Schenkeveld 2018: 259. Terentianus' retired Olympian also outdoes the ageing Milo of Ov., *Met.* 15.229–31, who can only weep as he sinks into decrepitude.

[37] Cf. e.g. Hor., *Sat.* 2.1.12–13, *Epist.* 2.1.259, and the examples collected by Wimmel 1960: 196.

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> He joined together **soft pieces of string** into a **smooth** mass, and just as a Parthian or Scythian **connects a smooth string** to the ends of their bow, so **he kept binding together** his pieces until he had a length of **slender rope** that would be sufficient for his well. And so then he would drag **jugs full of water from the depths of the darkness** by means of a **string so fine that it couldn't be grasped by the palm of his hand.** He concentrated the efforts of his entire body in his fingertips, and, holding fast to his **narrow rope** until his slippery burden emerged from the depths of the hole into the light above, he strived by tugging with each thumb in turn to conquer the weight so prone to fall back down.

There is a repeated and overwhelming emphasis on slenderness: this of course points up the apparent smallness or insignificance of the athlete's new exercise regime, in marked contrast to the immense effort and strain that it demands. Tension and suspense — in every sense of those words — build as the long description plays out and we wait to see whether the athlete will succeed or fail. We can almost feel our own fingers and thumbs joining in the struggle, and the stakes manage to feel both so high and so low all at once.

Moreover, the metapoetic imagery in these lines is everywhere to be seen. The athlete has woven a fine rope of narrow threads. In the first place, weaving has served as a metaphor for poetic composition since Indo-European time immemorial.[38] More importantly, the emphasis on slenderness introduces the poetic ideal of λεπτότης, subtlety and critical refinement in the Callimachean tradition.[39] And there is much more Hellenistic ideology to come. Indeed, Terentianus' very choice of metre puts into practice his avowed Callimachean ethos. Glyconics are by their nature a 'slender' metre, and so here our poet has matched form with content.[40] In some sense you might even say that he has assiduously woven together a series of small threads into a long and slender 84-line preface. This is the first of the many instances of lively interplay between form and content that we will see in Terentianus' poetry; such play is one of the hallmarks of his artistry, and precisely what you would expect from an author who describes metres in the very metres being described.[41]

Metapoetry may not stop there. The athlete's exercise is to use his slender thread to draw water from a well. From Hesiod's Muses bathing in the Hippocrene (*Theog.* 4–7; cf. *Theog.* 22–3) to Callimachus perhaps drinking from that font (*Aet.* fr. 2 H./Pf.) through the Augustan poets (e.g. Prop. 3.3.1–6, 51–2) and beyond, poets have been drawing water from pure springs:[42] Terentianus has appropriated that image with a twist, as his athlete draws water instead from the depths of darkness. The bottom of his well, to be certain, but also perhaps the rebarbative obscurity of Terentianus' slippery subject matter, out of which, using all his careful and subtle poetic technique, he crafts pure poetry. If he succeeds, he draws forth this poetry into the light — and if he fails, it will fall flat.

Finally, let us indulge in a bit of speculation. The first letters of lines 15–18 spell out *N I C A*: could they constitute a bilingual acrostic, representing νίκα, 'victory' or 'Victory' (with Doric alpha) or an imperative verb?[43] The context is right: we are talking about a

[38] See e.g. West 2007: 37–8.

[39] On the resonance of Callimachean λεπταλέος/λεπτός, see Harder 2012: II 62–3 with further bibliography.

[40] Cf. Morgan 2007: 389–99, 2010: 97–100 for the use of 'tiny' hendecasyllables by Martial with a perhaps similar effect. Terentianus Maurus' metrical variety, especially in *De metris* but also throughout his poems, is itself a Callimachean feature, embodying the πολυείδεια defended in *Ia.* 13.

[41] *Pace* Beck 1993a: 534, '… während der Bereich der Dichtung nur durch die Wahl der metrischen Form als äußerliches, vom Inhalt unabhängiges und dessen Darstellung … nicht beeinflussendes Element Eingang findet'.

[42] Cf. too e.g. Callim., *Hymn* 2.105–13; for the Greek tradition of poets drinking from springs, see Harder 2012: II 94–5, and on the broader symbolic importance of water for Greek and Latin poets, Wimmel 1960: 222–39; Cameron 1995: 363–6.

[43] For recent surveys of Latin acrostics, see Robinson 2019a (with extensive bibliography in n. 2 and p. 308); 2019b (with theoretical discussion); and Mitchell 2020; for acrostics and other wordplay in didactic texts, in

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victorious athlete, and this preface is full of Hellenistic motifs. Terentianus is moreover a poet who has Greek everywhere in his poem, in both Greek and Roman letters; he is even a poet who tells us explicitly that his poem was rubricated, and such an acrostic could have been highlighted for readers by its mise-en-page.[44] Could the word *inuicem* in the acrostic's opening line, combined with *extimis* in its closing, be gesturing to its bilingual nature and its location at the beginnings of the lines? Indeed, even the hypothetical Doric alpha could signal an awareness of the lyric poet Ibycus' use of the retired victor image.[45] Speculative and unprovable, I fully acknowledge, but the more you see of this poet's skill, the more you might be willing to countenance the possibility of such clever games.

Terentianus then emphasises the unexpected challenge of the athlete's exercise (36–50):

nil magnum gerere hunc putes
et tantum in digitis opus;
cunctis uisceribus tamen
occultus trepidat labor.
40 totum cernere, nec palam,
quo totum geritur queas:
caecis flatibus intimi
tenduntur laterum sinus,
et poples tremit et genu,
45 nec plantae stabiles manent.
nil immune relinquitur,
et **parua** est **uia** uiribus.
mos certaminis et modus,
sudor dum solitus cadat,
nulla mole palaestrica.

You'd think that what he was doing was no big deal and that the effort was confined to his fingers alone — but the hidden struggle is aquiver everywhere inside his body. You could see the whole thing, but it wouldn't be obvious where the whole thing is being carried out: the inmost pockets of his lungs are filled by invisible breaths, and his hamstrings and knees tremble, and his feet can't stay planted on the ground. Nothing is left unaffected, and yet there is but a **small way** out for his strength. The customary manner of a competition is preserved, while the usual sweat drips from his body, but without the struggle of a wrestling match.

'Small' might look easy, Terentianus says, but nothing could be further from the truth: in the case of this athlete's exercise, it requires extraordinary *labor*. It is a mighty struggle to draw a bucket full of water from the depths of a well using only a thin string and your fingertips, even if you cannot see the hard parts. So too, Terentianus will soon explain, is his own small-scale and fine-spun poetry the product of immense *labor*.

which they seem particularly frequent, see Gale 2019. For a Latin poet introducing a Greek word with Latin letters, see esp. Optatian 16 and 19, where, as here, reading left to right produces Latin words, while reading top to bottom produces Greek (see Pelttari 2014: 80–4; for more on Optatian, see n. 57 below). Cf. too Auson., *Epigr*. 85.1, where λείχει is to be deduced from 'Lais Eros et Itys, Chiron et Eros, Itys alter' (further Pelttari 2011: 477–8).

[44] Optatian's *uersus intexti* were rubricated (see previous note). For rubrication used to signal acrostics in other verse texts (e.g. *Anth. Lat.* 214 R^2), see Gale 2019: 144 n. 59 with further references. On this poem's rubrication, see section III below.

[45] Cf. n. 35 above.

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Toward the end of this passage Terentianus mentions a *parua* ... *uia*, a 'small way' out for the athlete's strength. This narrow road imagery, of course, is not just chance, as our poet makes clear in the lines that follow (51–8):

> sic nostrum senium quoque,
> quia iam dicere grandia
> maturum ingenium negat
> nec spirant animas fibrae,
> 55 **angustam studii uiam**
> et **callem tenuem** terit,
> tantum ne male desidi
> suescant ora silentio.

> So our old age too — because our fully ripened talent refuses to speak of lofty themes and our innermost parts no longer breathe such a spirit[46] — wears out a **narrow track of study** and a **subtle path**, just so that our mouth doesn't make the mistake of getting used to idleness and silence.

Here Terentianus finally moves to the payoff of his comparison, introducing himself for the first time. He programmatically refuses to speak of 'lofty themes' ('grandia'), instead opting for a 'narrow track of study' ('angustam studii uiam') and a 'subtle path' ('callem tenuem'). In the space of ten lines, then, we have three references to narrow roads — and how many narrow roads does a poet need to walk down before you start thinking of the prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*?[47] Three is actually a pretty good number, since that is how many Callimachus mentions (*Aet*. 1.21–8 H./Pf.):

> ....]...ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅττι πάχιστον
> θρέψαι, τὴ]ν̣ Μοῦσαν δ' ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην·
> πρὸς δέ σε] καὶ τόδ' ἄνωγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἅμαξαι
> τὰ στείβε⌋ιν, ἑτέρων ἴχνια μὴ καθ' ὁμά
> δίφρον ἐλ]ᾶ̣ν **μηδ' οἶμον ἀνὰ πλατύν**, ἀλλὰ **κελεύθους**
> **ἀτρίπτο**]υ̣ς, εἰ καὶ **στε⌊ι⌋ν̣οτέρην** ἐλάσεις.

> ... Poet, feed the sacrificial animal so that it becomes as fat as possible, but, my dear fellow, keep the Muse slender; besides, I also urge you to go where the big waggons never go, to drive your chariot not in the same tracks as others and **not along a wide road**, but along **untrodden paths**, even if you will drive it along **a more narrow one**. (Trans. A. Harder)

Terentianus, with his 'angustam studii uiam', seems to be looking directly to Callimachus' στεινοτέρην, just as his 'parua ... uia' paraphrases Callimachus' μηδ' οἶμον ἀνὰ πλατύν ('not along a wide road'). Indeed, even his choice of *callem* is pointed: *callis* means 'a rough track, path' (*OLD* s.v. 1), and is first found metaphorically here (*TLL* III 174.36–73);[48] Terentianus' path is 'rough' because it has not been paved by his poetic predecessors, but also because his very subject matter is rough and difficult. The epithet *tenuem* is likewise pointed: it alludes in Callimachean terms to the smallness of the path, but also perhaps to the sense that Terentianus' subject matter, *grammatice*, was sometimes derided as trivial and slight. Quintilian, for example, had to fight off such criticism of the *ars grammatica* (*Inst*. 1.4.5, 'quo minus sunt ferendi qui hanc artem ut

[46] With 'nec spirant animas fibrae' cf. perhaps the Horatian 'ne | ... ilia ducat' (*Epist*. 1.18–9, 'wheeze' or 'heave for breath': *OLD* s.v. *ilia* a), from the intertextual *recusatio* cited above.
[47] For road imagery in Callimachus' predecessors and followers, see Wimmel 1960: 103–11; Harder 2012: II 63–4 with further bibliography.
[48] There is a possibly near-contemporary parallel in the *Pontica* of [Solinus] (= *Anth. Lat*. 720 R²): 17–18, 'paruo | ... calle sequor'; see Venuti 2019b: 706–7.

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tenuem atque ieiunam cauillantur', 'so much the less should we tolerate those who complain that this art is trivial and jejune'). Terentianus' project is *tenuis* in every sense.

Terentianus then describes the actual content of his works (59–72):[49]

quid sit littera, quid duae,
60 iunctae quid sibi syllabae,
dumos inter et aspera
scruposis sequimur uadis.
fronte exile negotium
et dignum pueris putes,
65 adgressis labor arduus
nec tractabile pondus est.
at **mens** tenditur **acrius**,
ne contenta sit obuiis,
rimantemue recondita
70 **subtiles** fugiant **notae**,
neu discretio falsa sit
rerum **tam gracili modo**.

What is a letter, what are two, what are syllables when they're joined together — this is what we'll pursue among the thickets and rough terrain and rocky shallows. At first glance you might think this is a humble activity and fit only for children, but those who've undertaken it know that it's hard work and that the burden is hardly manageable. But the **mind** stretches itself even **more keenly** so that it's **not content with the obvious**, so that the **fine points** do not escape notice as one **searches out what is hidden in every crevice**, so that there's no false distinction in matters of **such refined subtlety**.

Metapoetic terminology again all but leaps off the page, as Terentianus describes the difficulty of his subject matter and his own diligence in pursuit of refinement and subtlety. This is a boast common to didactic poets, but Terentianus may look specifically to Lucretius (1.922–7):

nec me animi fallit quam sint **obscura**; sed **acri**
percussit thyrso laudis spes magna meum cor
et simul incussit suauem mi in pectus amorem
925 Musarum, quo nunc instinctus **mente** uigenti
auia Pieridum peragro **loca nullius ante**
trita solo.

I realise how **obscure** all this is, but high hope for praise has struck my heart with a **sharp** goad and at the same time has instilled in my breast a sweet love of the Muses, and I'm now driven on by that love, and with a lively **mind** I roam the **trackless paths** of the Pierides that have **never before** been **trodden by anyone's foot**.

Terentianus' *recondita* parallels Lucretius' *obscura*; both have *acer*; both have *mens*; both invoke the Callimachean untrodden paths. But Terentianus spurns Lucretius' high hopes for glory (cf. 84, 'pompae gloria uilis est', 'the glory of the grandiose is a trifling thing'); he is instead ostentatiously modest in his ambitions. Moreover, where Lucretius proudly claims to teach matters of great importance ('magnis doceo de rebus', 1.931), Terentianus insists that he is content to exercise his craftsmanship on a smaller scale. *Mutatis mutandis*, what Tore Janson has written of Pomponius Mela's preface surely applies here: 'His apology for the dryness of his subject may well have been intended

[49] For Ter. Maur. 59–60 as introduction to all three of Terentianus' poems, see n. 11 above.

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seriously, but it also serves discreetly to draw attention to the way in which the writer masters these difficulties. The more ungrateful the subject, the greater the merit of the writer who succeeds in presenting it artistically. What we have here is a … brand of mock modesty'.[50]

So Terentianus continues in apparently humble strain (73–84):

> instat **callida cautio,**
> ne sermo **ambiguum** sonet,
> 75 ne priscum nimis aut leue,
> uocum ne series hiet,
> neu compago fragosa sit,
> uel sit **quod male luceat.**
> dum **certo** gradimur **pede,**
> 80 ipsi ne trepident **pedes.**
> par examinis aestus est
> ceu sublimia disseras,
> par est iudicii mora;
> **pompae gloria uilis est.**

> **Skill and circumspection** are ever vigilant, avoiding **ambiguous** language, avoiding what's excessively archaic or colloquial, avoiding hiatus or a disjointed structure or anything **that's insufficiently clear**. While we advance with a **steady foot**, our **verses' feet** themselves must never tremble. This test is no less fervent than if you were discoursing on the most elevated topics, and the time required to pronounce judgement is the same. **The glory of the grandiose is a trifling thing.**

This closing passage is again deeply intertextual, garlanded with flowers plucked from Horace, especially from the *Ars poetica*. It is no surprise, of course, that a Latin poet writing didactic poems about the art of poetry would allude to his most famous predecessor in the genre, and we will see a number of such allusions later in his poems as well. But to stick to Terentianus' preface for the moment, with the opening line of our passage compare Hor., *Ars P.* 46–8:

> in uerbis etiam **tenuis cautus**que serendis
> dixeris egregie, notum si **callida** uerbum
> reddiderit **iunctura** nouum.

> In **carefully** and **subtly** weaving words together you'll speak very well if a **clever conjunction** makes a familiar word seem new.

Terentianus' 'callida cautio' is an allusive instantiation of Horace's 'callida … iunctura', blended with his foregoing *cautus* — quite fitting for a poet who is so avowedly concerned with the *tenuis*.[51] So too do Terentianus' 'ne sermo ambiguum sonet' and 'neu … sit quod male luceat' evoke Horace's 'parum claris lucem dare coget, | arguet ambigue dictum' ('[the good critic] will force you to illuminate what's insufficiently clear, he'll critique ambiguities of phrase', *Ars P.* 448–9): Terentianus promises that he will follow Horace's poetic precepts. And even Terentianus' foot pun, 'dum certo gradimur pede, ipsi ne trepident pedes', looks to Horace's 'pede certo' ('with sure foot', *Ars P.* 158). Now foot puns have a long history in Greek and Latin literature; they are found at least as early as Aristophanes (*Ra.* 1323), and poets like Ovid seem to make an

[50] Janson 1964: 99. See further Munzi 1992: 118–20 for discussion of the topoi of (mock) authorial modesty and difficulty of subject matter in late antique grammatical prefaces.
[51] Terentianus' allusion is perhaps an argument against Bentley's transposition of *Ars P.* 45, 'hoc amet, hoc spernat promissi carminis auctor', after 46, on which see Brink 1963–82: II 134–5.

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entire career out of them (*Am.* 1.1.4, etc.).[52] But when Terentianus Maurus, metrical magician, re-activates this traditional pun, he does so with full force: he is a poet who will write in some fifty metres. This is a programmatic and justified boast.[53]

Terentianus' closing *sententia* is also programmatic: 'pompae gloria uilis est', 'the glory of the grandiose is a trifling thing'. He concludes with a final rejection of grand poetry on grand themes. This caps the inversion of generic expectations that he has been working toward throughout the preface. For 83 lines he has defiantly revelled in the 'labor arduus' (65) of crafting small-scale poetry, arguing that such work is in every way equal to *sublimia* (82). Now, in his last line, he even dismisses the supposed glory of 'higher' genres. Terentianus, in short, follows the poetic pattern observed by William Fitzgerald, apparently claiming inferiority while in fact demonstrating superiority, turning 'weakness into strength' and forcing readers to adjust their own value judgments and hierarchies of genre.[54]

By now it should be clear that Terentianus is a very skilful poet. We have seen allusions, careful language, puns, and a persistently clever blend of self-deprecation and boasting as he exploits the productive tension between his small-scale poem and the hard work required to create it ('aw, shucks, this old thing? — and oh, by the way, you can't even imagine how hard it is to do what I'm doing here'). And he is not just parroting buzzwords from the poetic past: he has refashioned this intertextual tradition into his own poetry for his own ends. In his preface Terentianus Maurus gives every promise of being a worthy heir to the Alexandrian tradition of didactic poetry.

III THE REST OF THE POEM (85–2981)

Poets are on their best behaviour in programmatic prefaces, but Terentianus Maurus puts his poetic ideals into practice in the rest of his poetry, too. His *De litteris* (Ter. Maur. 85–278) treats the pronunciation of individual letters; *De syllabis* (279–1299) the pronunciation of syllables, with special attention to particular difficulties; and *De metris* (1300–2981, incomplete) the rules and origins of a variety of metres. We will take a close look at selected passages from all three of these poems, and I will show that Terentianus' refined literary features are not confined to programmatic purple patches — he is simply a refined literary poet.

1. De litteris

De litteris first. We will examine a connected series of passages from the end of the poem. After describing the pronunciation of all the other letters, Terentianus is left with the semivowels, which pose particular difficulties (222–39):

septem reliquas hinc tibi uoce semiplenas
uix lege solutus pote nominare sermo.
has uersibus apte quoniam loqui negatur,
instar tituli fulgidula notabo milto:
225 ut quamque loquemur, datus indicabit ordo:

[52] Cf. Hinds 1985: 19: 'Latin poets are always ready for *any* wordplay involving human and metrical feet'. For recent discussion of and bibliography on Latin foot puns, see Cowan 2021: 718–19. A short catalogue of such puns in both Greek and Latin is collected in Barchiesi 1994: 135–7.

[53] The seeds of the image may have been sown already at 45, 'nec plantae stabiles manent', 'and his feet can't stay planted on the ground' — Terentianus outdoes his Olympic comparand here. Cf. 305, 'pedum līber', and 307, 'labili uersu', for more possible punning.

[54] Fitzgerald 2019.

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F L M N R S X.

...

235 at tertia clauso quasi **mugit** intus ore.
quartae sonitus figitur usque sub palato,
quo spiritus anceps coeat naris et oris.
uibrat tremulis ictibus aridum sonorem
has quae sequitur littera.

The seven remaining letters, the semivowels, can scarcely be named even in prose. Since I can't put them into suitable verse, I'll mark them out for you in shining red ink like a title: we'll talk about each in the order given below:
F L M N R S X

...

But the third [**m**] '**moos**', as it were, from within a closed mouth. The sound of the fourth [**n**] is produced just beneath the palate, where the breath of the nose and the mouth comes together. The letter which follows these [**r**] **causes a harsh sound to vibrate with quivering blows**.

Terentianus says that he was able to put the rest of the letters into verse: *a* ('ā'), *b* ('bē'), *c* ('cē'), *d* ('dē'), *e* ('ē') — but he apparently did not say 'ef' or 'el' or 'em'. For him, these sounds were evidently just 'f' or 'l' or 'm'; they were continuants that did not require a helping vowel and so could scarcely even be pronounced properly in Latin prose, let alone be made to fit verse.[55] What to do with the unscannable is a long-standing poetic problem — think of the Ennian *induperator* for *imperator* (*Ann.* 78 Sk. etc.) or Horace's little town 'quod uersu dicere non est' ('which can't be named in verse', *Sat.* 1.5.87) — and it is one Terentianus will confront over and over again in these poems, solving it in different ways.[56] But his solution here is particularly creative: he has inserted the seven problematic letters as a rubricated title. Indeed, while notionally perhaps speaking only of his own autograph copy, Terentianus' description of the rubrication would seem to serve as instructions to his copyists as well. Terentianus is not the only ancient author to refer to rubrication, but he is very nearly the only extant author to give such explicit instructions for its use in his own work.[57]

His descriptions of the letters themselves are no less artistic. The 'third', i.e. *m*, 'moos' (*mūgit*) from within a closed mouth. Try it: close your mouth and moo like a cow. It is an excellent description, and even in saying the onomatopoetic *mugit* you make the right sound. So too is his description of *n* quite accurate (again, try it). And he outdoes himself in his description of *r*: 'uibrat tremulis ictibus aridum sonorem | . . . littera', 'the letter causes a harsh sound to vibrate with quivering blows'. He is describing a trilled *r*, and again the form of his verse matches its content, as in the first two words of the line

[55] Terentianus was not alone in pronouncing the names of these letters as free-standing syllabic consonants (cf. e.g. Auson., *Technop.* 13), but the more practical system of 'ĕf ĕl ĕm' also existed, perhaps always dominated, and certainly prevailed in the end: Gordon 1973: 17–29; Allen 1978: 113–14. Beck 1993a: 360–2 explains Terentianus' choice here as a deliberate poetic departure from a regularly accepted 'ĕf ĕl ĕm' system.

[56] Cf. e.g. Ter. Maur. 822–6 (semivowels again; also 1055), 1368–9 (the word παρίαμβον), 1481–4 (ἀντίσπαστον), 1561–5 (intractable epitrites). For the problem of versifying the unmetrical in Greek and Latin more generally, see Kassel 1975; further Gowers 2012: 208–9, on Hor., *Sat.* 1.5.86–90.

[57] The only real parallels known to me are found in Optatian (Opt. Porf., *Carm.* 17.11–13, 19.1; not cited in the *TLL* entries below), on the materiality of whose poetry see Squire 2017a: 30–53; 2017b: 57–84. More generally cf. Ov., *Tr.* 1.1.7; Plin., *HN* 33.115, 122; Ven. Fort., *Carm.* 9.7.41; these and further examples at *TLL* VIII 984.84–985.2 (s.v. *miltus*) and *TLL* VIII 1026.83–1027.6 (s.v. *minium*). Terentianus may also have intended his example verses to be rubricated (Ter. Maur. 1003 with Cignolo 2002: 397 n. 38); on such 'functional' rubrication in grammatical manuscripts, see De Nonno 2000: 150–1 and Morelli 2000: 550–1.

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you are forced to trill the *r* in successive syllables.[58] It is not easy to describe the pronunciation of letters clearly and accurately; it is not easy to do so with literary verve; it is not easy to do so in sotadean verse.[59] Terentianus takes this small-scale poetic exercise and executes it to perfection — in fact, he handles his discussion of Latin letters in verse better than the vast majority of ancient grammarians manage it in prose.[60] He is a poet in sovereign command of his material and his medium.

Terentianus follows his description of the Latin semivowels with a digression (247–74). He claims that the Pythagoreans have a system in which letters correspond to numbers — not the one everybody knows, where α = 1, β = 2, γ = 3 and so forth, but one based on place of articulation. Thus γ, κ, ξ and χ have the same value (Ter. Maur. 260), as do δ, θ and τ (Ter. Maur. 264). Vowels are not counted. The passage is obscure, as this bit of Pythagorean numerology does not seem to be attested elsewhere, at least not in this form.[61] But it looks a lot like the 'Major System', a modern memory technique that maps numbers onto letters in almost exactly the same way (so *d*, *t* and *th* correspond to the number 1; *k*, hard *g*, hard *c* and hard *ch* correspond to 7; etc.).[62] The Pythagoreans must have had a similar system, whether used as a mnemotechnic or a mystical device or for some other purpose.

But just as Terentianus seems to be on the verge of telling us more, he demurs and offers instead an elegant envoi (274–8):

haec sunt quoniam **uiribus altiora nostris**,
275 si tam **tenues res** tibi sic dissero uersu
uitem ut tenebras quas solet et soluta uersu
oratio **paruis** minus explicare **rebus**,
sat duco meas hactenus occupasse **nugas**.

Since **this material is beyond our strength**, if I manage to expound such **subtle things** to you in verse in a way that avoids the obscurities which usually befall even prose speech when it tries to explain these **recherché things**, I'll be content with what my **trifles** have accomplished thus far.

Here we return to the themes of the preface. Terentianus says that the intricacies of Pythagorean numerology are 'beyond our strength', recalling the *uires*-topos of *recusationes* generally and perhaps Horace again specifically (*Ars P.* 38–40):

sumite **materiam uestris** ... **aequam**
uiribus et uersate diu, quid ferre recusent,
quid ualeant umeri.

Take up material appropriate to your strength and think long and hard about what your shoulders can bear and what they can't.

Terentianus would be following Horace's advice here, not trying to do what is beyond his powers. He also picks up on his own prefatory simile of the struggling athlete. With

[58] *aridus* can be used of sound (*OLD* s.v. 5 'harsh, grating'), but there just might also be a pun in *ar-idum sonorem*, an 'r-ish sound' (although admittedly the Latin name for *r* was *ĕr*).

[59] You might wonder why Terentianus has chosen sotadeans for this poem. Perhaps it is because the ethos of this metre was 'anti-epic' (Morgan 2010: 40–8), a fitting choice for a poet who declines to write lofty verse and discusses instead the pronunciation of Latin letters, and/or perhaps he is mischievously repurposing their racy associations (on which see e.g. Connors 1998: 31) for what might seem an 'unsexy' project.

[60] On Terentianus' outdoing prose grammarians, see Beck 1998: 3221.

[61] Cf. Beck 1998: 3226–8; Cignolo 2002: 289–91 (finding no traces of the doctrine in earlier sources). Most interesting in this connection — and not yet adduced, as far as I know — are some of the debates surrounding the reform of the Athenian alphabet in 403/2 B.C., in which both the Pythagoreans and letter classification by place of articulation find mention; see further D'Angour 1999: 115–19.

[62] For the history of this method, see Gardner 1988: 104–6.

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'tenues res' and 'paruis ... rebus' we hear the twin echo of the 'triviality' of Terentianus' subject and the critical refinement with which he has treated it. So, too, does he emphasise here how he has strived to avoid obscurity in his exposition (cf. 73–8). And if he has succeeded in a clear presentation of his material, he says, he is well content with his literary *nugae*. Again we have a 'humble brag', blending apparent modesty with implied boasting.[63] And of course the very word *nugae* has an illustrious history in this context, being the word Catullus uses to describe his own supposedly small-scale and trifling but actually well-wrought poetry (Catull. 1.4) — whatever exactly Catullus himself meant by *nugae*, later authors will have thought of his refined example.[64] Thus in closing *De litteris*, Terentianus recalls the poetic principles of his preface with a series of programmatic intra- and intertextual references.

2. *De syllabis*

So ends *De litteris*. If we turn the page in a modern edition, we meet with the beginning of *De syllabis*, where the same artistry is everywhere on display (279–85):

syllabas, quae rite metro congruunt heroico,
280 captus ut meus ferebat, disputatas attuli
uersibus, sane modorum quo sonora **lēuitas**
addita stili **lĕuaret** siccioris taedium.
haec prius, Bassine fili et tu gener Nouate mi,
perpolite, quam potestis, **crebriore limula**,
285 non pater tamquam socerque, sed uelut sim extrarius.

The syllables which properly fit into the heroic metre I've laid out here in verse, as far as my abilities allowed — in verse so that the sonorous **smoothness** of the lines might **lighten** the tedium of a rather dry style. Bassinus, my son, and Novatus, my son-in-law, first **polish** these verses as much as you can **with frequent application of a refined file** — not treating me like a father or a father-in-law, but as if I were a stranger.

Terentianus declares his subject in the first word and the first line: he focuses on syllables, and in particular on syllables in hexameter verse. He then explains why he is writing in metre at all: so that the 'smoothness' (*lēuitas*) of the lines might lighten (*lĕuaret*) the reader's potential boredom. Just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down in the most delightful way: the reader will think of Lucretius' famous 'honey on the cup' passage, where Lucretius offers the same reasoning for presenting Epicurean philosophy in hexameters (Lucr. 1.934–50). But Terentianus has also included a pun with a variation in quantity, which I suspect is not just there for our aesthetic pleasure, but to rework Lucretius' own pun in that passage (Lucr. 1.939–42):

ut puerorum aetas inprouida ludificetur
labrorum tenus, interea perpotet amarum
absinthi laticem **deceptaque non capiatur**,
sed potius tali facto recreata ualescat.

So that the unwitting age of children may be beguiled as far as the lips, and meanwhile may drink the bitter draught of wormwood, **and though charmed may not be harmed**, but rather by such means be restored and come to health. (Trans. C. Bailey.)

[63] Cf. nn. 50 and 54 above; for the specific emphasis on accuracy of content over elegance of form, see Janson 1964: 125–34.
[64] Cf. e.g. Plin., *Ep.* 4.18.4; Mart. 4.10.4, 9. pr. 5. On the valence of *nugae* for Catullus, see Newman 1990: 7–42; on the word in Catullus and Martial, Batstone 1998; on the general development of *nugae* and related terms as ironic apologies for small-scale poetic compositions, Mattiacci 2019.

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Terentianus' allusion refigures Lucretius' etymological wordplay into a metrical pun: entirely appropriate for a metrical magician concerned with vowel quantities.[65]

Moreover, Terentianus declares his adherence to the ideals of Horace's *Ars poetica*. He entrusts his poems to his son and his son-in-law to polish 'with repeated application of the file'.[66] *polio* and its compounds are commonly used to describe putting the finishing touches on literary works (cf. again Catull. 1.2), and such 'refinement' is one of the key ideas of Horace's *Ars poetica*. Horace is in fact the first extant author to use *lima* figuratively to refer to the revising and polishing of literary work, famously speaking of the *labor limae* (*Ars P.* 291). Terentianus' choice of the diminutive form *limula* is perhaps self-deprecating in the spirit of *nugae* and a recollection of Catullus' love of diminutives in his polished *libellus* — or perhaps, because Terentianus' subject matter is so small and fine, he requires a correspondingly small and fine instrument to polish it.[67] And Terentianus is without any doubt thinking of Horace in this passage. Little allusions abound in what follows,[68] but we can consider in some detail a passage just a few lines later (314–16, 324–6):

hoc **domi clausum manebit,** nec sinam nosci prius
315 scrupulum quam **uestra** demat hunc mihi **sententia,**
opera nobis haec **inanis,** an<ne> in usum impensa sit.
...
corrigenda si qua sane uisa uobis hinc erunt,
325 **non ero stulte repugnans, aut amans praue mea,**
quin statim **culpanda delens** praebeam **rectis** locum.

> This work **will remain under lock and key at home**, nor will I allow it to be known until **your judgment** has set my mind at ease on this question, whether our **efforts** have been **in vain** or have some usefulness.
> ...
> Of course if anything seems to you to **need correction, I won't fight against it like a fool or cling to my bad ideas**; I'll straightaway **cross out the offending passages** and replace them with **what's right.**

This is an elegant intertextual blend of two Horatian passages of advice on critical revision: Hor., *Ars P.* 386–90:

[65] Cf. perhaps Ter. Maur. 19 *lēuem*, which seems guaranteed by Terentianus' metrical practice in glyconics (his lines' first syllable elsewhere is always long), but in context perhaps with a hint of *lĕuem* too. Quantitative puns may have been all the more available as distinctions in vowel length were collapsing in contemporary pronunciation; cf. n. 19 above.

[66] It is hard to tease out the power dynamics implicit here in a father asking filial figures for correction (cf. also 1287–90); in the *Ars poetica*, too, there is a complicated negotiation of power when a poetically 'superior' older man writes to the aristocratic young Pisones as a social inferior (see esp. Rimell 2019).

[67] Terentianus often uses diminutives (collected at Werth 1906: 309–11); the explanation that they are employed *metri gratia* (so Cignolo 2002: 298 of *limula*, repeating the assertion of *TLL* VII 2.1427.12–13; likewise Werth 1906: 310) is insufficient: *līmă* or *līmā* easily fits the metre (trochaic tetrameters here). Metrical considerations could of course play a part in Terentianus' decisions, but many of these diminutives have clear expressive functions (e.g. Ter. Maur. 21 *funiculi* of the slender rope, or 216 *Graecula* with depreciating intent). See more productively Janson 1964: 145–6 (on depreciating diminutives in Latin prose prefaces, where metre cannot be easily invoked). For Catullus' use of diminutives see e.g. Chahoud 2021: 131–3; note also that diminutives seem to be a feature of the '*poetae nouelli*' (Courtney 2003: 372). The suggestion that Terentianus needs a fine file for his fine poetry is made by Beck 1993a: 155–6, *ad loc.*

[68] Cf. e.g. 294, 'sermo si planus pedestri se tenet modestia' ~ *Ars P.* 95, 'sermone pedestri'; 296–8, 'uerba si non appetita nec remota plurimis, | sed fere communis usus et tamen non obuia, | carminis seruant honorem' ~ *Ars P.* 46–7, 'dixeris egregie notum si callida uerbum | reddiderit iunctura nouum'.

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... siquid tamen olim
scripseris, in **Maeci** descendat **iudicis** auris
et **patris** et **nostras** nonumque prematur in annum
membranis intus positis: **delere** licebit,
390 quod non edideris, nescit uox missa reuerti.

Nevertheless if at some point you write something, let it be subjected to the **critique** of the ears of a **Maecius** and **your father's** and **my own**, and **put your parchment safely aside at home** for nine years: you can **expunge** what you haven't published, but a word that's been sent forth doesn't know how to return.

And Hor., *Ars P.* 438–52:

Quintilio si quid recitares, '**corrige** sodes
hoc' aiebat 'et hoc'; melius te posse negares,
440 bis terque expertum frustra, **delere** iubebat
et male tornatos incudi reddere uersus.
si defendere delictum quam uertere malles,
nullum ultra uerbum aut **operam** insumebat **inanem**,
quin sine riuali teque et tua solus amares.
445 uir bonus et prudens uersus reprehendet inertis,
culpabit duros, incomptis adlinet atrum
transuerso calamo signum, ambitiosa recidet
ornamenta, parum claris lucem dare coget,
arguet ambigue dictum, **mutanda** notabit.

If you recited something to Quintilius, he would say, '**Correct** this, please, and this'; you could deny that you could do any better — you'd tried twice and three times before in vain — he would order you to **expunge** and return to the anvil poorly wrought verses. **If you preferred to justify your mistake rather than delete it**, he would waste no further word or expend **pointless effort** to prevent you from loving yourself and your own work alone and without a rival. A good and prudent man will criticise flaccid verses, **he'll reproach** harsh ones, he will place a black mark next to inelegant ones with a turned pen, he'll prune back excessive ornamentation, he'll force you to illuminate what's insufficiently clear, he'll critique ambiguities of phrase, he'll mark down **what needs to be changed**.

Horace tells the aspiring poet to keep his work at home ('membranis intus positis') until it has passed critical judgment (including that of family members) and is fully ready; Terentianus declares that he will keep his poem under lock and key ('domi clausum manebit') until Bassinus (his son) and Novatus (his son-in-law) have given it their imprimatur.[69] Horace criticises poets who defend their poems' imperfections rather than fix them ('si defendere delictum quam uertere malles'); Terentianus says that he will not fight against (i.e. '*defend* himself from') adverse criticism nor will he be foolishly in love with his own stuff ('non ero stulte repugnans, aut amans praue mea'): if there are things to be corrected ('corrigenda'), he will straightaway excise the reprehensible parts ('culpanda delens') and make space for what is right ('praebeam rectis locum'). The Quintilius of Horace would say 'correct this' ('corrige ... hoc') and order that to be deleted ('delere iubebat'); that is precisely what Terentianus will do. Horace's critic will reproach ('culpabit') certain verses and mark out what needs to be changed ('mutanda'); Terentianus will obliterate the *culpanda*. Indeed, there is even Horatian *imitatio* in

[69] In contrast to the usual emphasis on the benevolence of the corrector (see Janson 1964: 141–3), Terentianus here asks for no special treatment ('non pater tamquam socerque, sed uelut sim extrarius', 285), perhaps following Horace's precepts for critical revision.

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apparently innocent phrases. Terentianus awaits the judgment of Novatus and Bassinus about whether his labor has been in vain ('opera … inanis') or has some usefulness; the only other place in extant Latin literature where *opera* is paired with *inanis* is in our intertextual passage of Horace, 'operam … inanem' (*Ars P.* 443).

As I have already observed, it is no surprise that a didactic writer on poetry would show knowledge of the most famous didactic poem on poetry in the Latin tradition. But more than simply signalling that he is aware of the poetic tradition and that he is entering into it himself, Terentianus is deliberately showing just how closely he has followed Horace's advice. He thus proves that he is doing what a good poet is supposed to do; with the dense Horatian intertextuality in these passages, Terentianus is legitimating his project against the most important critical standard and demonstrating his competence and authority to write a didactic poem on poetry himself.

3. *De metris*

Much more can be said about the preceding passages and about *De syllabis* more generally, but let us now breathe some of the even more rarefied air of *De metris*. Although incomplete, *De metris* is the longest of Terentianus' extant works, and in many ways his most impressive.[70] Over the course of nearly two thousand lines, he describes the details of a minutely marshalled host of Latin metres — and he describes these details in the very metres that he is discussing. He constantly plays with form and content, and he continues his allusive poetics, all while communicating a lot of practical information about patterns of longs and shorts.

Terentianus begins *De metris* in trochaic tetrameters (1300–1456) and sotadeans (1457–1579), but at line 1580 he shifts into an epodic system of dactylic hexameters alternating with iambic trimeters. This shift is a classic instance of Terentianan metrical form reflecting his poem's content: Terentianus is a 'derivationist', tracing all metres back to expansions and contractions and resolutions and substitutions and combinations of dactylic hexameters and iambic trimeters.[71] Indeed, he traces both the dactylic hexameter and the iambic trimeter back to a single primitive six-foot Urform. The aetion for this original metre is Apollo's fight against the giant snake Python, during which, Terentianus says, the Delphic people gave a double cheer (1584–95):

additur haec **gemino** non **absona** fabula **metro**,
1585 seu uera res est, spectet auctorem fides.
cum puer infestis premeret Pythona sagittis
Apollo, Delphici **feruntur** accolae
hortantes acuisse animum bellantis, ut illos
metus iubebat aut propinqua adoria.
1590 tendebat **geminas** pauida exclamatio **uoces**,
ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν:
spōndēīs īllūm prīmō nātūm cērnīs sēx.
ex parte uoces concitas laeti dabant,
ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν:
1595 **ĕt hīnc pĕdūm tŏt ōrtŭs ēst ĭāmbĭcūs.**

[70] Cf. Beck 1998: 3244: 'Terentianus' wahres . . . Meisterstück'; Servius *GL* IV 468.4 'superfluum . . . putaui . . . post Terentianum metra digerere'. We probably have the vast majority of the poem; what is missing from the end is a treatment of the Horatian metres in four-line stanzas (Cignolo 2002: 574).

[71] This is in opposition to a theory involving eight or nine *metra prototypa*, basic metrical feet. On these two ancient theories of the origin and development of verse forms, see Leonhardt 1989; Beck 1998: 3244–5; Pretagostini 2011; D'Alessandro 2012: 25–51; Zetzel 2018: 177. For the technical terms *adiectio* ('addition'), *detractio* ('subtraction'), *permutatio* ('exchange'), and *concinnatio* ('combination [of individual cola]'), see Pretagostini 2011: 222 with discussion and references, as well as Ter. Maur. 1599–1603.

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> There is moreover this story which explains the **double metre** in a not **unharmonious** fashion — and maybe it's true; let your trust look to the credibility of the story's source. When Apollo as a youth was overwhelming Python with a storm of hostile arrows, the inhabitants of Delphi **are said** to have shouted encouragement to strengthen his spirit as he did battle, as their fear or their reverence for his presence dictated. They let out a fearful exclamation of **two/two-fold words**, *īē paīān, īē paīān, īē paīān*: **you see here the origin of the hexameter verse in six spondees**. But they also let out a happy shout of excited words, *ĭē paĭān, ĭē paĭān, ĭē paĭān*: **and from this arose the iambic verse of as many feet.**

Terentianus introduces this tradition with some well-chosen wordplay: there is a 'non absona fabula', a 'not unharmonious story', to explain the origin of the double metre. On the one hand this simply means that the story fits. On the other, however, it means more particularly that the story is metrically apt for the phenomenon that it explains. Terentianus alludes to the antiquity and multiplicity of the tradition with his Alexandrian 'feruntur' (1587); this footnote may serve to distance himself from that tradition, whose truth he has already left to the reader's judgement (1585), declaring that the reader must look to the authority of the tale's source — which, in true allusive fashion, he never names.[72]

In line 1590 Terentianus breaks from his epodic system, writing three consecutive hexameters to describe the origins of the dactylic hexameter, and he again introduces the key phrase with a pointed pun: the people let out an exclamation consisting of 'geminas … uoces', 'two words' (i.e. ἰὴ παιάν) or 'words with two forms' (i.e. ἰὴ παιάν = two spondees or two iambs;[73] cf. 'gemino … metro' just above). Terentianus' wordplay, of course, is not either/or: it is both/and. So in the first instance he scans ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν, ἰὴ παιάν as six consecutive spondees, which he then glosses in 1592 with a holospondaic line, the only such verse in his poem. Form perfectly mirrors content as Terentianus describes the origin of the dactylic hexameter.

At 1593, Terentianus switches from dactylic hexameters to iambic trimeters. Line 1594 repeats line 1592 with different scansion, this time six consecutive iambs. And so in the following line (1595) Terentianus writes a purely iambic Latin verse to point to and point up the origin of the iambic trimeter. And with that he has done it, deriving both dactylic hexameters and iambic trimeters from one original exclamation — given to support the god of poetry, no less! — matching his metrical form to his aetiological content at every sure-footed step, and adding in plenty of wordplay and allusive poetic reference along the way. In his masterful presentation of the material, he communicates both information and his poetic authority. He will organise the rest of *De metris* along derivationist lines from these original forms, first treating metres that derive from the dactylic hexameter (1608–2180), then metres springing from the iambic trimeter (2181–2538), and finally metres that arise from blending the two (2539–2981).[74]

[72] For us it is first attested in Heraclides of Pontus, fr. 158 Wehrli (110 Schütrumpf) = Ath. 701 E–F; Gottschalk 1980: 134 is sceptical that Heraclides was himself a full-fledged derivationist. Cf. further e.g. Callim., *Hymn* 2.97–104 with Williams 1978 *ad loc.*, and, for parallels in the Latin grammatical tradition, Beck 1998: 3244 n. 70. The metrical story has a musical analogue in the explanation of the *Pythikos nomos* found in Strabo (9.3.10) and Pollux (*Onom.* 4.84), which features both dactylic (or spondaic) and iambic musical segments depicting Apollo's battle with Python (see West 1992: 212–14; Della Bona 2017: 112–14); the musical and metrical traditions seem somehow interrelated and overlapping. On Alexandrian footnotes, see n. 34 above.

[73] The varying prosody and orthography and etymology of ἰὴ are much discussed (see e.g. Danielewicz 2016; for tables of forms and metres, see Käppel 1992: 66–7, 76–9). παιάν, on the other hand, is normally a spondee, but here is also scanned as an iamb by internal correption (see e.g. West 1982: 11; further Sjölund 1938: 35–8, not mentioning this instance); this iambic scansion has foxed some scholars (e.g. Geer 1933: 35; Beck 1993b: 275). Cf. too Ter. Maur. 500–13 on 'consonantal iota'.

[74] For Terentianus' organising signposts, see esp. 1596–9, 2181, 2539–42.

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Much of Terentianus' artistry in this poem is to be found in the details. So, for example, at one point he discusses dactylic hexameters that end in an iamb (1920–40). Now you might say to yourself, 'Latin hexameters that end in an iamb? I've never seen such a thing'. Terentianus has anticipated this objection (1927–30):

> si nusquam hoc aliquis lectum putat, ecce dabĭtur
> uersus Homericus Ausonio resonans ita mŏdo
> quemque miuron Achaica gens uocitare solĭta est:
> 'attoniti Troes uiso serpente pauĭtant'.

> If someone is thinking that this sort of thing isn't found, look, I'll give a Homeric example 're-sounded' into Latin verse of the sort that the Greeks used to call a 'mouse-tailed' (i.e. 'tapering') verse: *attoniti Troes uiso serpente pauĭtant*.

Of course Terentianus is explaining the phenomenon in question while also writing lines that exemplify it (ending *dabĭtur*, *mŏdo*, *solĭta est*), but he outdoes himself in pointing to a Homeric example. He could simply cite the Homeric verse in Greek (cf. ἰὴ παιάν above), but here he *re*fashions it into Latin verse (with a deliberately *re*performative *re*-prefix). What is the verse? *Il.* 12.208 Τρῶες δ' ἐρρίγησαν ὅπως ἴδον αἰόλον ὄφιν. Terentianus has kept the sense, kept the hexameter, and kept the iambic finish: a small-scale tour de force of form matching content in literary translation. Moreover, he alludes to the scholarly discussion that attended this Homeric verse and those like it, so-called στίχοι μείουροι ('mouse-tailed lines'), Latinising the Greek technical term as the hybrid form *mĭuron* (Latin prosody with Greek declension).[75] This Homeric verse is the *locus classicus* for ancient scholarly discussions of the form, and Terentianus simply expects you to know about the Homeric passage and the learned controversy that surrounds it — otherwise you will miss almost all of what is going on here.[76] This is Hellenistic poetry in Latin form.

Terentianus' translations from Greek have a quiet confidence about them, as the reader is expected to recognise the original and so recognise Terentianus' skill.[77] So consider his translation of the opening lines of Theocritus' first *Idyll*, from a passage where he is discussing the importance of the bucolic diaeresis to the pastoral genre (2123–30):

> pastorale uolet cum quis componere carmen,
> tetrametrum absoluat, cui portio demitur ima
> 2125 quae solido a uerbo poterit conectere uersum,
> bucolicon siquidem talem uoluere uocare.
> plurimus hoc pollet Siculae telluris alumnus —
> ne Graecum immittam uersum, mutabo Latinum:
> dulce tibi pinus summurmurat, en tibi, pastor,
> 2130 proxima fonticulis; et tu quoque dulcia pangis.

> If someone wants to compose a pastoral poem, he should end his fourth foot with a word break and fill out the verse with two feet that begin from a complete word, since this is the sort of verse that they've decided to call 'bucolic'. In this genre (pastoral)/metrical form (bucolic diaeresis), the son of the Sicilian land is far and away the best — to avoid introducing a Greek verse here, I'll rewrite it in Latin:

[75] For other Greek words with Latin prosody in Terentianus, see Cignolo 2002: 444.

[76] On mouse-tailed lines in Greek, see West 1982: 173–4. The scansion of ὄφιν at *Il.* 12.208 remains without a satisfactory explanation; as Hainsworth 1993: 340 observes, 'the στίχοι μείουροι of the ancient metricians are a statement of the problem, not its answer'.

[77] Terentianus' modesty about his Greek (1971) is not to be taken seriously (rightly Beck 1998: 3215); in addition to the Greek translations discussed here, cf. e.g. 1885–8, 1960–4, 2148–55. Caesius Bassus, one of Terentianus' sources, also seems to have preferred translating Greek examples into Latin (Zetzel 2018: 69).

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dulce tibi pinus summurmurat, ‖ en tibi, pastor,
proxima fonticulis; et tu quoque ‖ dulcia pangis.

(Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 1.1–3 ἁδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἁ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα, | ἁ ποτὶ ταῖς παγαῖσι, μελίσδεται, ἁδὺ δὲ καὶ τύ | συρίσδες.)

We are, of course, meant to understand that 'the son of the Sicilian land' is Theocritus, and that Terentianus has translated the opening lines of Theocritus' *Idylls* into Latin, again keeping the sense and the hexameter and the metrical detail in question (the bucolic diaeresis). We are perhaps also meant to recognise that 'Siculae telluris' is a Vergilian tag (*Aen.* 1.34),[78] which may help introduce the following lines (2131–4):

iugiter hanc legem toto prope carmine seruat;
noster rarus eo pastor Maro, sed tamen inquit:
'dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? an Meliboei?
non, uerum Aegonis: nuper mihi tradidit Aegon.'

Theocritus observes this rule continuously in almost the whole of his poem; our Vergil seldom follows it to that extent, but nevertheless he does say:

dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? ‖ an Meliboei?
non, uerum Aegonis: nuper mihi ‖ tradidit Aegon.

Terentianus' observation is accurate: Theocritus does use the bucolic diaeresis extensively, and Vergil is more sparing.[79] Terentianus loves Vergil ('noster … Maro'), who is his most common source of examples throughout his poetry,[80] but here I suspect that he is allowing that Vergil is only second-best as pastoral poet. Terentianus had begun his discussion of the bucolic diaeresis by instructing the budding pastoralist to write such lines; he then says that Theocritus is far and away the best at 'this'. Whether by *hoc* he means the pastoral genre or the bucolic diaeresis, it is pretty clear that Theocritus does it better than Vergil. Indeed, Terentianus goes on to say in as many words that Vergil does not use the bucolic diaeresis anywhere near so often as Theocritus — i.e., Vergil does not follow Terentianus' prescription.

Furthermore, the Vergilian example that Terentianus has cited is both homage and challenge. Terentianus has quoted the opening two lines of the third *Eclogue*; these lines themselves are a translation of Theocritus (*Id.* 4.1–2). This need not cast shade on Vergil — i.e., it need not imply that Vergil is somehow secondary — but it does show that Terentianus can play Vergil's game too, and just as well: Vergil has translated the first two lines of Theocritus' fourth *Idyll*, keeping the bucolic diaeresis; Terentianus has done the same for the much more famous first *Idyll*. These examples are not chosen just to exemplify the metre; they have metapoetic intent, and in them and in Terentianus' remarks about them we can see both literary criticism and poetic rivalry.

Another Vergilian example with an element of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* occurs just a few lines later. Terentianus is now talking about adonics, i.e. the typical dactyl-spondee close of

[78] The juxtaposition of *tellus* and *alumnus* is likewise Vergilian (cf. *Aen.* 6.876–7), but it is more generally poetic (*TLL* I 1796.52–60).
[79] In Theocritus' bucolic poems, 74 per cent of the hexameters feature a bucolic diaeresis (West 1982: 154); a sense pause accompanies the fourth-foot word break about 31 per cent of the time (Kunst 1886: 54). In Vergil's *Eclogues*, the numbers are lower: about 63 per cent of verses show a bucolic diaeresis (as calculated by a query of www.pedecerto.eu); a sense pause is present in about 6.5 per cent of verses (Weber 1987: 268 n. 39).
[80] See n. 22 above.

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a hexameter. He says that Sappho had written a poem composed only of adonics, and then he says that he can do so too (2161–78):

fingere nobis
tale licebit:

primus ab oris (*Aen.* 1.1)
Troius heros, (*Aen.* 6.451 etc. [5x in *Aen.*])
2165 perdita flammis
Pergama linquens,
exul in altum (*Aen.* 3.11)
uela resoluit:
saepe repulsus
2170 Ausone terra (sim. *Aen.* 3.171, 4.349, 6.807)
moenia fessis (*Aen.* 3.85)
sera locauit;
unde Latinum (*Aen.* 1.6)
post genus ortum (cf. *Aen.* 1.6)
2175 altaque magnae (cf. *Aen.* 1.7)
moenia Romae. (*Aen.* 1.7)

pluribus idcirco, paruis ut notius esset
uersiculis carmen condi potuisse, peractum.

And what is Terentianus' poem? Beck refers to it in passing as a 'little *Aeneid*'.[81] Terentianus' passage, however, is not exactly a little *Aeneid* in the Ovidian mould; it is not a retelling of the whole *Aeneid*, but rather a reworking and expansion of the *Aeneid*'s proem, as shown by the first and last lines (the endings of *Aen.* 1.1 and 1.7 respectively), as well as by the fact that it has precisely twice as many lines as that passage. Terentianus displays his wide knowledge of Vergil's poem, as the Vergilian cento is sewn together with only a few bits of Terentianan thread.[82] And rewriting Vergilian epic in short compass is a project characteristic of our poet: the man who spent much of his preface thematising a poetics of small-scale composition has here almost literally cut (and pasted) a grand epic narrative down to his preferred size. He is, moreover, exquisitely self-conscious about what he has done. Switching to hexameters, he explains: 'pluribus idcirco, paruis ut notius esset | uersiculis carmen condi potuisse, peractum'. He has written this poemlet, he says, to show that a full poem can be composed in 'small verselets' — to exemplify his own avowed aesthetic tastes. And while the word *condi* could be chosen for any number of reasons — it is a common enough way to describe poetic composition (*OLD* s.v. *condo* 14) — in context one thinks of the importance of the term in the *Aeneid* and notes that Terentianus has perhaps deliberately drawn attention to it by *not* quoting *Aen.* 1.5 ('dum conderet urbem') in his cento. For Vergil, *condere* is used of both construction (*Aen.* 1.5) and destruction (esp. *Aen.* 12.950, 'ferrum aduerso sub pectore condit').[83] Terentianus, in an act of creative destruction or destructive creation, has done both, chopping up Vergil and 'burying' him by re-arranging the *disiecta membra* into a new poem. Terentianus could have picked almost anything he wanted to exemplify the adonic verse, but he has

[81] Beck 2003: 387 'little *Aeneis* in mini-cento'; cf. Beck 1998: 3252 'Einen Mini-Cento bilden V. 2163 ff.'.
[82] One compares the much larger Vergilian cento of another (probably) third-century African, Hosidius Geta, who wrote a 461-line *Medea* composed of Vergilian phrases: see comprehensively Rondholz 2012 (84–9 on the author's origins and dates).
[83] On *condere* in the *Aeneid*, see James 1995.

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chosen to pay homage to Vergil while daring to rival him in redoing 'his way' the most famous lines in all of Latin literature.

One last passage. Much of *De metris*, of course, is taken up with descriptions of the rules and regulations governing various Latin metres. And much of the aesthetic pleasure to be had from these descriptions comes from Terentianus' delicate interplay of form and content, as he writes the rules in the very metres that he is discussing, always with the 'sure step' of his preface. To adapt a couplet of Tennyson's, 'hard, hard, hard is it, only not to tumble, | so fantastical are the dainty metres'![84] And in these explanations, too, Terentianus Maurus' careful craftsmanship is ever present. Let us consider his discussion of galliambics, which comes from near the end of *De metris* as we have it (2885–2900):[85]

2885 hoc si sic repetamus, ut secundo
supremam dare syllabam negemus,
iuncto commate galliambos exit,
sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbōrūm, sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbō.
sonat hoc subinde metro Cybeleium nemus,
2890 nomenque galliambis memoratur hinc datum,
tremulos quod esse Gallis habiles putant modos;
adeo ut frequenter illum prope ab ultimo pedem,
măgĕ quō sŏnūs uĭbrētūr, stŭdĕānt dărĕ trĭbrăchȳn.
ănăpaēstus esse **primus**, spondeus aut solet;
2895 duo post **ĕrūnt ĭāmbi**, tribrachysue subicitur,
linquitque comma primum catalecticam breuem.
pariambus et trochaei duo comma posterum
tribrachysue continebunt, superatque semipes.
seruasse quae Catullum probat ipse tibi liber,
2900 'super alta uectus Attis celeri rate maria'.

If we repeat this [the form of the foregoing verse] but take away the last syllable from its second half, when the two cola are joined together you've got a galliambic:

sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbōrūm, sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbō.

The grove of Cybele continually resounds with this metre, and they say that the name 'galliambs' was given to the metre because they thought its trembling nature was well suited to the Galli, to such an extent that they often **try to make the penultimate foot a tribrach so that the verse warbles all the more. The line usally starts with an anapaest** or a spondee, then two **iambs follow**, or a tribrach is added, and the first colon ends with a catalectic short. A pyrrhic and two trochees or a tribrach finish off the second half of the verse, and a half foot is left over. Catullus' *liber* shows that he kept this metre rigorously:

sŭpĕr āltă uēctŭs Āttīs cĕlĕrī rătĕ mărĭă.

Terentianus had been discussing hendecasyllables, a discussion that he has concluded by focusing on the line's closing eight syllables (an anacreontic), as represented by *sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbōrūm*. In keeping with his organising methodology, in our passage he proceeds to derive the galliambic verse from a repetition of that colon with catalexis, i.e., *sĕgĕtēs*

[84] Tennyson's second line went 'so fantastical is the dainty metre', referring to hendecasyllables; his attempts at English hendecasyllables and alcaics were published in the *Cornhill* in 1863 (on which see Markley 1998: 464–5).

[85] Cignolo 2002: 572 notes that Terentianus' discussion here draws on that of Caesius Bassus (*GL* VI 261.28–263.11 = 26.10–28.21 Morelli). Even a glance at that passage shows Terentianus' art in reworking his grammatical source material into poetry.

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mĕūm lăbōrūm, sĕgĕtēs mĕūm lăbō: and *voilà*, we have the metre and its derivationist origin. At this point Terentianus shifts into galliambics himself, and he gives some details about the metre's 'real world' background. The metre was named after the Galli, the self-castrated priests of Cybele, who do seem to have used it in hymns to the goddess.[86] Terentianus says that it is well-suited to them because it has a tremulous quality, just like their voices. He then says that the basic form of the verse is frequently modified to bring out this warbling quality all the more: 'they often try to make the penultimate foot a tribrach'. A fair description of metrical reality, but look at its form:

măgĕ quō sŏnūs uĭbrētūr, stŭdĕānt dă<u>rĕ trĭbră</u>chȳn

A galliambic line in which form mirrors content perfectly. Terentianus has made the penultimate foot (*-rĕ trĭbră-*) a tribrach, i.e, three consecutive shorts — and he has also literally made it 'tribrach', i.e. the word itself (*tribrachyn*). But he is not done: in the next line he points out that 'the line usually starts with an anapaest'. And what has Terentianus started with? *ănăpaēstus* — again an 'anapaest' in every sense of the word. And still more: 'two iambs follow', *duo post ĕrūnt <u>ĭāmbi</u>*: he has done it yet again!

This is the sort of small-scale artistry that Terentianus' poem abounds in, and working to understand such craftsmanship is essential if you want to appreciate his poetic project and enjoy his poetry. It is hard enough to give the rules for a bunch of Latin metres concisely and accurately, making sure to include the relevant Realien (Galli and Cybele) and requisite bits of literary history (Catull. 63). It is even harder to organise all this information in a coherent framework, deriving each metre from the one before it in a family tree going all the way back to an originary ἰὴ παιάν. And it is harder still to put metrical terminology like 'catalectics' and 'cola' and 'half-feet' into verse at all, let alone to describe hendecasyllables in hendecasyllables and galliambics in galliambics and so on through the entirety of the Latin metrical canon. All these are hard, but Terentianus goes further: so complete is his command of his material and his metres that he can accomplish all these feats of technical bravado while writing clever and allusive literary verse. This is the Alexandrian ideal of didactic poetry put fully into practice.

IV CONCLUSION

Terentianus Maurus is not a grammarian, except insofar as his raw materials are harvested from the traditional preserves of grammar. He is instead a didactic poet who has fashioned those raw materials into elegantly wrought poetry. Throughout his works he speaks in the voice of a practicing poet giving practical instruction to other poets. But already in late antiquity he had become a source for the grammarians, and so he gradually began to be absorbed into the grammatical tradition himself. Terentianus Maurus *is* a good source for grammarians, both ancient and modern, and there is nothing wrong with reading him for the unique and valuable philological information that he preserves. But to read Terentianus *only* as a source is to ignore the work of literary art that he has so carefully crafted, and to banish him to a life among the *grammatici* is to ensure that most of those who would enjoy and appreciate that art will probably never even sight it from afar. And Terentianus is a poet whose art cannot be appreciated from afar.

Early on in *De syllabis*, Terentianus tells us how he wants his poetry to be read (317–23):

sed **labor** uobis ferendus in legendo est **maximus**:
non enim cursim aut remisse **tam minuta acumina**

[86] Or at any rate there was a tradition of Hellenistic poetry in galliambics in honor of Cybele; see the testimony of Hephaestion (Consbruch 1906: 38.6–39.1) with Nauta 2004.

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adsequi quicumque poterit, sed **morosa** intentio
320 tam legenti debet esse, quam fuit nobis quoque,
qui **laborem** prouocando, perdomando taedium,
forsitan neglecta multis e latebris scalpsimus,
ardui laudem expetentes, **non fauorem ex obuiis.**

> But you need to **work really hard** while you're reading this poem: it won't offer up its **subtle refinements** to just anyone on a quick or cursory reading. The reader needs to give the same **protracted** (*mŏrosa*) attention to our text as we gave in writing it, we who — by confronting **hard work** and overcoming weariness — **have scraped out from their hiding place things perhaps neglected by many**. We've sought the **glory of the difficult, not praise for the obvious.**

This is yet another passage full of metapoetic meaning. These lines programmatically propagate an ideology of poetic reward through difficulty and hard work, *labor*. The poem's reader must work, just as the poem's author had to. Throughout we hear echoes of the language of Terentianus' preface, with its emphasis on the mighty struggle required to grapple with such minute and subtle and frankly intractable material (cf. e.g. 39 'occultus trepidat labor'; 65 'labor arduus'; 66 'nec tractabile pondus'). Just as Terentianus had claimed in his preface that he was 'not content with the obvious' (68, 'ne contenta ... obuiis'), but deliberately pursued the difficult struggle ('labor arduus'), here he insists that he is seeking 'the glory of the difficult, not praise for the obvious' ('ardui laudem ..., non fauorem ex obuiis'). Such work is a challenge, but as the alliteratively rhyming and chiastic wordplay of line 321 underscores ('laborem prouocando, perdomando taedium'), it is a challenge that the poet has met willingly and overcome. And therein lies the glory of his achievement. Terentianus is not, however, just boasting about what he has accomplished; he is promising to readers that if they struggle and persevere, their hard work, too, will be rewarded.

Each of these verses is bursting with meaning. Consider the associations conjured by the vivid line 'forsitan neglecta multis e latebris scalpsimus' ('we've scraped out from their hiding place things perhaps neglected by many').[87] We recall first the image from the preface of the athlete struggling to draw jugs of water 'imis ab tenebris' ('from the depths of the darkness', 24). Moreover, the phrase 'neglecta multis' evokes Terentianus' prefatory boast of venturing on untrodden poetic paths; Terentianus is not doing what has been done by 'the many'. Finally, the last word, *scalpsimus*, is a striking and unexpected verb that may be working on two levels. On one, we have the image of the poet scratching at the dirt to dig out what is hidden in the darkness (*OLD* s.v. *scalpo* 1c, 'remove from the ground by scratching, dig out with the nails'), a variant on the prefatory simile: difficult, literally 'hardscrabble' work.[88] But on another, *scalpo* means 'sculpt' (*OLD* s.v. 2), in this case to carve enduring works of art out of material that others have neglected. Terentianus is grubbing in the dirt and creating high art all at once.

We should also pause one last time to appreciate a piece of significant Terentianan metrical wordplay: *mŏrosa intentio*. The adjective *mŏrosus* is first attested here; the word would have stood out for readers. It derives from *mora*, and so *mŏrosa intentio* means on the one hand 'protracted attention' (cf. 83 'iudicii mora'). And yet there is doubtless a quantitative pun here, as the reader will think of the much more common *mōrosa* ('pedantic') as well: you need more than a bit of pedantry to appreciate what

[87] *neglecta* is a certain correction of the transmitted *nec lecta*; *multis* is much more likely to go with *neglecta* than with *latebris* (*multae latebrae* is nonsensical, and joining *multis e latebris* would vitiate the medial caesura, on which Terentianus places particular value in trochaic tetrameters: 308–10): see Beck 1993a: 161, Cignolo 2002: 309.

[88] And an image that sometimes carries negative connotations: cf. Hor., *Sat.* 1.8.26–8 (of witches) 'scalpere terram | unguibus . . . | coeperunt'.

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Terentianus has done in this poem. And could there even be a third sense? If *mora* can also have the sense of 'metrical unit', then Terentianus is further saying that you have to pay attention to his quantities to get his poetry.[89] And of course the very word he uses to make the point also exemplifies it: form matching content yet again. Terentianus both demonstrates and instructs the reader in how he should be read.

In this passage, Terentianus is notionally talking to Novatus and Bassinus (= *uobis*), whom he elsewhere describes as ideal readers, endowed with wisdom and charity and an indefatigable capacity for hard work (cf. 1288–9 'quibus est amor et prudentia iuxta, | et labor in studiis semper celebratus inhaeret', 'who possess love and wisdom in equal measure, and who are famous for constant and tireless work in literary studies'). But of course he is also addressing us, all his readers. And he is right. A cursory or superficial reading of Terentianus Maurus will not do: 'deses et impatiens nimis haec obscura putabit' ('the lazy and impatient [reader] will think that these things are too obscure', 1285). Terentianus' poems yield up their rewards only on close and careful study; they require laborious philology in every sense of those words. But Terentianus' poetry is worth such a reading, because he composed it with such care and artistry. In among the grammatical nuggets, there is a much richer literary treasure to be found.

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ABBREVIATION

GL = H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* (8 vols), Leipzig, 1857–1880.

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[89] The usual ancient word for 'unit of syllable length' was *tempus* (*OLD* s.v. 13, Schad 2007: s.v. pp. 396–7; so e.g. Ter. Maur. 125 and often). The word *mora* does not appear to have been an ancient technical term (no instances cited in the *TLL*). But *mora* is certainly a word with metrical associations (cf. e.g. [Mar. Vict.] *GL* VI 31.23 'tempus … est spatium morae, per quod syllaba longa extenditur, breuis uero contrahitur'), and indeed Terentianus uses it thus elsewhere: 'scandendo … illic ponere adsuetam moram | quam pollicis sonore uel plausu pedis | discriminare qui docent artem solent' (2253–5). Terentianus happens to be the first extant author to use *scando* in the metrical sense ('scan', 547 and elsewhere); perhaps he is also the first extant author to so use *mora* and its derivatives?

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