ANALYSING LATIN STYLE

Selection of scholarly literature


Forthcoming:

Seven aspects of 'style':

WW, RR, TT and T

1. When?
2. Who?
3. Rhetoric
4. Register
5. Tempo (length of sentences, pace of narrative or argument)
6. Texture (simplicity or elaboration, amplification and reinforcement)
7. Tone (emotional 'temperature', use of focussing devices, familiarisation or defamiliarisation, attitude to audience)
HISTORY OF LATIN STYLE

1. When? and 2. Who?
(Writers about style in bold - not that they always know best)

The formative period – the ones who didn’t know they were archaic:
200-150 BC        Plautus, Terence, Cato the Elder, Ennius

The Gracchan gap: lost tragedy, satire, oratory

The ones who knew they were classical:
100-40 BC          Late Republic (Cic. Lucr. Catull. Sall.)
                    Cicero De Or., Brut., Orator
40BC-AD14          Augustan (Virg. Hor. Prop. Ov. Liv.)
                    Horace Epp. 2 & AP

The ones who knew they were modern:
AD54-68            Neronian (Sen. Luc. Petron.)
                    Quintilian Inst. Or., Tacitus Dialogus

The ones who wanted to be archaic again:
2nd cent. AD       Second Sophistic (Apul.)
                    Fronto

3rd cent. AD onwards Latin Grammarians (codification of written language because the
spoken language had changed and diversified)

The ones who wanted to be either classical or Christian:
4th-5th cent. AD    Late Antique

How to distinguish features of the period from features of the author?

For late Republican prose we have:

Cicero: 16 OCT volumes published + 3 planned, total 19, versus:

Rhetorica ad Herennium: equivalent of one OCT volume
Caesar and continuators: 2 OCT volumes
Sallust: one slim OCT volume (Histories lost except for a few speeches)
Varro: equivalent of two OCT volumes (De Lingua Latina and De Re Rustica) plus fragments
        of a vast output

Importance of genre: Cicero Ad Fam. 15.1 and 15.2 are military dispatches, virtually
        indistinguishable in style from Caesar’s Commentaries (verbs at end, etc.)
Example 1: Cicero and the example of the Grand Style in *Ad Herennium*


Made-up sample of ‘grand’ style in *Ad Herennium* 4.12:

_Nam quis est vestrum, iudices, qui satis idoneum possit in eum poenam excogitare, qui prodere hostibus patriam cogitarit? Quod maleficium cum hoc scelere comparari? Quod huic maleficio dignum supplicium potest inueniri? In eis qui violassent ingenuum, matremfamilias constuprasse, ulnerassent aliquem aut postremo necassent, maxima supplicia maiores consumpsarent: huic trunculentissimo ac nefario facinori singularem poenam non reliquerunt. Atque in aliis maleficis ad singulos aut ad paucos ex alieno peccato iniuria pervenit: hulus sceleris qui sunt ad fines uno consilio universis civibus atrocissimas calamitates machinantur. O feros animos! O crudeles cogitationes! O derelictos homines ab humanitate!_

For who is there among you, gentlemen, who could think of a sufficiently fitting penalty for a person who has thought to betray his country to the enemy? What crime can be compared with this wickedness? For this crime what appropriate punishment can be found? Our ancestors used up their greatest punishments on those who had violated a free-born boy, committed adultery with the mother of a family, had wounded someone or, finally, killed him: but for this most aggressive and nefarious deed they did not leave us a unique penalty. Furthermore, in other crimes the injury arising from another’s misdeed affects either individuals or a few; those who are implicated in this crime are plotting the most atrocious calamities for all citizens together at one stroke. O savage minds! O cruel plottings! O humans devoid of humanity!

Rhetorical features common to this example and Cicero

Turning up emotional temperature:

- Emotionally loaded vocabulary: fatherland, crime, wickedness, betrayal, violation, ...
- Exclamations
- Rhetorical questions
- Superlatives

Reinforcement, elaboration, amplification:

- Parallelisms
- Anaphora
- Ascending Tricolon

Other rhetorical figures:

- Antithesis
- Hyperbaton (focussing device)
- Etymological play on words (*figura etymologica*, paronomasia)
- Rhythmical sentence-endings e.g. _cogitarit, comparari, inveniri, machinantur_

‘Cicero speaks the same language as others, but speaks it better’ (L. Laurand, *Études sur le style des discours de Cicéron*, Paris 1933, 154).
Cicero would avoid:
Clash of emphasis in *idoneam passit in eum poenam excogitare, qui ...*
Inappropriately transferred adjective in *truculentissimo facinori* (normally only persons can be *truculent*).

**Example 2: Caesar’s continuators**

Caesar would never be caught doing this:  
*duum haec ita fient, rex luba, cognitis Caesaris difficultatibus copiarumque paucitate, non est visum dari spatium convalescendi augendarumque eius opum.* While these events were going on in that way, king Juba, on receiving reports of the difficulties Caesar was in and the small size of his forces, it seemed better that he should not be given the opportunity to recover and build up his strength.  
(example cited by Roland Mayer *Aspects of Latin Prose* p. 198.)

**REGISTER**

What is register? An English example to illustrate four common registers:

- Where are you going?  
- Where’re you off to then?  
- Prithee maiden, whither away?  
- Please state destination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NEUTRAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>COLOQUIAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>ARCHAIC/POETIC</strong></th>
<th><strong>FORMAL/OFFICIAL</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

There are many other registers (or sub-registers) and the range of options is the same for all speakers.

For Latin the pioneering work was done by B. Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter* (Lund, 1945). See also my chapter on Juvenal in *Aspects of Latin Poetry* pp. 311-334.

**Example 1: A made-up example to illustrate Normal vs. High vocabulary**

The birds were singing. A woman and a girl were riding on horseback. Suddenly they saw a snake. They drew their swords; and for the snake, death ensued.

**Normal:**

*Aves cantabant. Mulier et puella equo vehebantur. Subito serpenterm viderunt. Gladios strinxerunt; serpenterm mors secuta est.*

**High:**

*Volucres caneabant. Femina et virgo sonipedem flectebant. Repente anguem conspexerunt. Enses strinxerunt; anguem letum secutum est.*
Example 2: Parody of high and low registers from *Ad Herennium* 4.15-16:

High:

*Nam qui perduellionibus venditat patriam non satís subplicii dederit si praeceps in Neptunias depultus erit lacunas. Poenite igitur istum, qui montis bellí fabricatus est, campos sustulit pacis.*

For whosoever hath sold his fatherland for treasons, shall not have paid sufficient penaltie if he be cast headlong into the Neptunian deeps. Be ye therefore avenged on him, who hath forged mountains of war and hath taken away the plains of peace.

Low:

*Nam istic in balneis accessit ad hunc. Postea dicit: 'Hic tuus servus me pulsavit'. Postea dicit hic illi: 'Considerabo'. Post ille convicium fecit et magis magisque praesente multis clamavit.*

Now this chap in the baths came up to my client. Then he said ‘This slave of yours just hit me’. Then my client said to him: ‘I’ll have a think about it.’ Then he started insulting him and shouted louder and louder with a lot of people there.

**TWO GAMES COMMONLY PLAYED AT A-LEVEL (and elsewhere)**

**(A) The Alliteration Game**

Its history:

(a) Teachers in the 1970s read Wilkinson and got excited.
(b) Pupils cottoned on to the fact that you could identify alliteration without knowing what the Latin means.
(c) Teachers told them that they must show understanding of the meaning of the Latin, and that they should not comment on alliteration without saying what it is there for.
(d) Pupils went on commenting on alliteration because it was easy to spot, and then added in their knowledge of the meaning of the Latin, but in a quite disconnected way.

*Virgil Aen. 4.1-5 At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura vulnus alit venis, et caeco carpitur igni.*

*Multa viri virtus animi multusque recursat gentis honos; haerent infixo pectore vultus verbaque, nec placidam membris dat cura quitem.*

1. What counts as alliteration?

(a) Consonants, not vowels (cf. assonance, e.g. iamdudum saucia cura)
(b) Consonants at the beginning of words or stressed syllables (technically ‘onset’), not elsewhere
(c) Can be simple or complex patterning, but not so complex that you can’t hear it.
2. What does alliteration do?

(a) It is a form of defamiliarisation (mostly we don't talk alliteratively) and makes the language more striking and memorable.
(b) It conjures up the mood of older Latin poetry e.g. Ennius
(c) It may be part of a figura etymologica (viri virtus) or an anaphora
(d) It creates or reinforces a connection between the words with repeated sounds or the sentences that contain them (honos: haerent; cura quietem)
(e) It may be iconic, i.e. reflect the actual sounds of the events being described (e.g. the snakes in Aeneid 2)

What does alliteration NOT do?
Except as under 2c-e above, it does not convey meaning in itself. Quote from an A-level script c. 1982 'In sumptus supellectilis the repeated S sounds emphasise the idea of cost'. NO!

(B) The Emphasis Game

'The most emphatic positions in a Latin sentence are the beginning and the end' [proverbial].

Where this is the case, it is an accidental consequence of the actual basic rules of Latin word order which are as follows:

The TOPIC of a sentence (what the sentence is about) goes first. It is usually emphasised to some extent, and may be given additional emphasis through e.g. the addition of particles like quidem or autem.

The MAIN FOCUS of a sentence (the part bearing the main point of emphasis in the sentence) goes after the Topic.

_Libertatem et consultatum_ (Topic) _L. Brutus_ (Main Focus) _instituit_.
The Main Focus may occupy the final position when everything else has been topicalised: _di sciant, hominem quidem scire arbitror neminem._

The verb may be:
(a) in default position at (or near) the end.
(b) the Topic.
(c) itself the Main Focus.
(d) immediately after the Main Focus, in which case it confers extra emphasis on the word(s) before it. Cic. _Catil. 1.5 Castra sunt in Italia contra populum Romanum in Etruriae faucibus collocata:_ the main focus falls on _castra_ and this is reinforced by the immediately following verb _sunt_; then _in Etruriae faucibus_ is emphasised by coming immediately before the participle _collocata._