

An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot

Being the Prologue to the Satires

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What This Is *and* Is Not.

In a similar fashion to other analyses, this review will only consider *metrical variations* in the verses. However, the *common* substitution of a *trochee* for an *iamb* at the start of a verse will not be analyzed here. Some of Pope's verses are what we call feminine, but I have not included all of them since many do not qualify as a metrical variation.

Pre-reading will always bring certain words to light as being slightly troublesome. However, this only occurs if the reader is intent on maintaining or forcing a *pure iambic* verse. In some cases this is not possible. The metrical accent and speech stress do not align and gives the reading a very unnatural sound and rhythm.

What is done here is to highlight the change of foot. There is no doubt whatsoever that Pope would have been concerned with what actual foot was being used. It would be of no consequence to him at all, provided the rhythm is maintained no poet is going to be concerned about the foot.

Many would query the point of this exercise in analysis, and the short of it is that there is nothing here for the poet. This is a purely educational, academic and somewhat theoretical treatment of meter and so rhythm. The interest part is to look at the verse and see *why* it works. The beauty of it is that the poet would not plan it this way, it's just how it comes along. A master like Pope has no concern for this, better to use his time writing, as should all poets irrespective of form.

This poem is written as an epistle, but uses a dialogue form. This is indicated by the use of initials P. and A., representing Pope himself and Arbuthnot. Naturally, these letters are not sounded in the reading, but will help the reader recognize the change of voice. The subtitle is not something to take notice of as it was given by Warburton in his edition of the *Poetical Works*, 1751 and not by Pope.

Verse 10:

- 09 *By land, by water; they renew the charge;*
10 ***They stop the chariot, and they board the barge.***

This couplet is interesting, not from the point of the perfection in construction, but in that the syllable count is different for each verse. Now syllable count is not necessarily important because it is the manner by which the verses are read. However, as we have already experienced, Pope is the master of the riming couplet (or heroic couplet). So how is it that this minor variation in verse 10 blends so well with its companion verse 9 and runs so well into the next verse, verse 11? There appears to be no difference whatsoever in the listening, yet we will not be able to successfully divide the verse into a series of iambs.

The companion verse is very straight forward:

- 09 **Bŷ lānd | bŷ wā | tĕr thĕy | rĕnĕw | thĕ chārgē**

We find that metrical accent and speech stress align perfectly with emphases on the relevant (important) words or syllables. Verse 10 is slightly different:

- 10 **Thĕy stōp | thĕ chārĭōt | ° and | thĕy bōard | thĕ bārgē**

We may have been looking for a *three-syllable substitution*, but this would not have sat well with since the sounding and rhythm is still that of five feet. We note that the verse definitely starts with an iambic foot and finishes with two iambic feet. So what happens in between?

Some careful analysis is required for the interpretation of the middle feet. In essence, we are looking at five syllables in total, but the breakup is not as simple as a three-syllable foot and iamb. The combination does not work.

If we listen carefully at how we would naturally read the verse, we obtain a glimpse of its construction. Without a doubt there is a significant pause before *and*. We could say that the comma has been metrically timed, which is a possibility or we could be looking at a *pause-* or *half-foot*. Punctuation is not always metrically timed and some will debate the validity of this, but nevertheless sometimes it is and at others it is not. The foot may also be

interpreted as a clipped foot, but in practice this is more common at the start of a verse. In this case the punctuation is metrically timed.

What we do find is the presence of the *secundus paeon* which is actually a reasonably common foot in English poetry. As we see, it sits well and accounts for the quickness in reading the second foot which cannot be matched by any other combination of feet. The five metrical accents align perfectly with the natural speech stress giving the illusion that the verse is fully iambic.

Naturally Pope would not have planned this as such, it is simply how it comes from the master of the riming couplet.

Verse 28:

27 *Friend to my Life! (Which did not you prolong,*
28 ***The world had wanted many an idle song)***

Once again, we find that one verse has a minor variation. In this instance it is the second verse of the couplet. The first is as expected apart from the trochee start. This would be gauged by the end of verse 26 and indentation of verse 27, akin to a new paragraph.

27 **Frīend tō | mŷ Līfe | whīch dīd | nōt yōu | prōlōng**

The emphasis is required on *Friend* for dramatic effect. Placing the speech stress on *to* has a very negative effect on the delivery.

For companion verse, we can consider it as:

28 **Thě wōrld | hăd wāntěd | mānŷ | ăn ī | dlě sōng**

The use of the amphibrach allows the correct enunciation of *wanted* which we can detect by the necessity of a faster reading. Also note the trochee happily following the amphibrach and so giving the appropriate metrical accent and speech stress.

Given the manner by which we read this verse, we naturally tend to blur the two syllables of *wanted* along with *had*, the foot sounds, and indeed the verse

has the iambic pentameter rhythm. The amphibrach is a valid substitution for the iamb and is capable of maintaining the rhythm in such a position, especially when followed by the trochee. A lesson to be learnt and remembered.

Verses 45 & 46:

- 45 *'The piece you think is incorrect: why take it,*
46 *I'm all submission, what you'd have it, make it.'*

I have included this couplet because unlike others which show a variation in only one verse, this mirrors the construction in both verses for an eleven-syllable count. The couplet proper is *feminine* in its rhythm.

- 45 **Thě pīece | yōu thīnk | ĩs ĩn | cōrrēct | whŷ tāke ĩt**
46 **Ī'm āll | sŭbmīs | sĭōn whāt | yōŷ'd hāve | ĩt māke ĩt**

In each verse, we have what is known as a *feminine ending*. It may appear at first that the same word is used as the *ultimate* rime, but we see that the rime is on the *penultimate* syllable as should be expected. The feminine rime is also known as the *double rime*, based on riming the last stressed syllable. If there are no further syllables, it is known as a *masculine* rime. The terminology comes from the French usage of ending in an *e-mute*.

As you can hear, the verses of this couplet have a very different melody to them due to their construction. It is not a variation that one would use too much or too closely, since the reader's sense of rhythm can be easily disturbed when coming back to the rhythm proper.

Verses 49 & 51:

- 49 ***Pitholeon sends to me: 'You know his Grace,***
50 ***I want a Patron; ask him for a Place.'***
51 ***Pitholeon libell'd me—'but here's a Letter***
52 ***Informs you, Sir, 'twas when he knew no better.***

The name that gives us cause to look more carefully at these verses is that of ***Pitholeon***. There are four syllables with a natural emphasis on the second

syllable: *Pi-thō-le-on*. This in itself gives us a hint as to the first foot of the verses involved. Verse 49 becomes:

| 49 Pīthōlēōn | sēnds tǒ | mē ° | Yōū knōw | hīs Grāce

The *secundus paeon* starts the verse with trochees following. The pause in the third foot is due to the necessary punctuation being metrically timed, and so the foot acts as a trochee. These follow well from the *secundus paeon* and allows the verse to gather its rhythm and finish with iambs. The verses skips along beautifully and is in most aspects a very good match for the companion verse. Verse 51 renders as:

| 51 Pīthōlēōn | lībēll'd mē | ° 'būt | hēre's ā | Lēttēr

Notice that this is **not** an Alexandrine, even though the syllable count may be appropriate. We can sense that there are few iambs in the verse due to the length and emphases in non-iambic positions. Once again the *secundus paeon* starts, but time the dactyl follows to give the appropriate emphasis. The punctuation is once again metrically time to take the place of an iamb. We note the trochees for dramatic effect, The quickness of this verse is to match it with its companion where the combination of iamb and amphibrach mirror the final three feet of verse 51:

| 52 Īnfōrms | yōū Sīr | 'twās whēn | hē knēw | nō bēttēr

The match works well. We have the five feet, the five metrical accents and the very natural five speech stresses aligning. All of these are working together to give the sound and rhythm of iambicity.

Verses 75 & 78:

| 75 *A. Good friend, forbear! you deal in dang'rous things.*
76 *I'd never name Queens, Ministers, or Kings;*
77 *Keep close to Ears, and those let asses prick;*
78 *'Tis nothing— P. Nothing? if they bite and kick?*

These verses are included not because there is any metrical variation, but as an example of the dialogue form that appears in the epistle. The interjection of A. (Arbuthnot) begins in verse 75. Even in these couplets we can sense that there are two people even if the A. and P. were not included. In some

versions the initials not given, but it is still clear that the speaker has changed. Pope (P.) begins the dialogue from the very start of the epistle (verse 1).

Verse 96:

95 *Whom have I hurt? has Poet yet, or Peer*
96 *Lost the arch'd eye-brow, or Parnassian sneer?*

Verse 95 demonstrates the usual iambic rhythm which is easily worked with basically single syllable words:

95 **Whōm hāve | Ī hūrt | hās Pō | ęt yēt | őr Pēer**

Of course one could also use a trochaic foot in the first if more dramatic effect is required in the reading:

95 **Whōm hāve | Ī hūrt | hās Pō | ęt yēt | őr Pēer**

There is a minor difference in the interpretation, but both are appropriate. As one may surmise, it is *Parnassian* that requires some investigation.

96 **Lōst thē | ārch'd ēye | brōw őr | Pārñās | sīān snēer**

Placing either metrical accent or speech stress on **the** is not desirable and hence the trochee. The speed of reading does not require *Parnassian* as secundus paeon, but it is happily split as an iamb and anapest with the combination of *sneer*.

As an aside, *Parnassian* relates to poetry, as the concept of being poetic. It is associated with strictness of form and technical perfection. Somewhat more concerned with metrical form rather than emotion. It may be used as an adjective or noun.

It is just an amazing word to use, but it did have more meaning in Pope's time.

Verse 153:

- 153 *Yet then did Dennis rave in furious fret;*
 154 *I never answer'd,—I was not in debt.*

Another verse for those I may call the *bean counters*, those who attempt to read the verses as if they are completely made up as iambs. There are valid substitutions which allow for a slightly different rhythm for part of a verse, but this does not affect the overall iambicity of the verse.

Attempting a pure iambic construction of verse 153 leads to stumbling at *furious*, the syllable count will not allow it.

- 153 **Yět thēn | dīd Dēn | nīs rāve | ĩn fū | rīōus | frēt ??**

It appears to be an incomplete verse, but in reality is not.

- 153 **Yět thēn | dīd Dēn | nīs rāve | ĩn fū | rīōus frēt**

We find that the anapest makes its appearance for the last foot which fits the reading speed of *furious*. Note that both metrical accent and speech stress are aligned. The anapest allows the slightly longer verse to maintain its rhythm and match the companion verse:

- 154 **Ī nēv | ěr ān | swēr'd Ī | wās nōt | ĩn dēbt**

which is a well constructed pure iambic verse.

Whereas we may be tempted to run with the pure iambic feet and so rhythm, it is always recommended that we pre-read to render these minor variations.

Verse 206:

- 205 *Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend,*
 206 *A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend;*

Verse 206 is rather straight forward as far as the feet are concerned. The effect of pure iambs will be to place an unnatural metrical accents **and** speech stresses on *and a* giving *suspicious* a rather longer sounding of the

second syllable. There is also some confusion as to the emphasis placed on the first syllable.

| 206 **Ǻ tīm | rōūs fōe | ǻnd ā | sŭspī | cīōus frīend**

Clearly this unnatural sounding can be rectified by the use of a trochee rather than iamb. With this interpretation and reading, *suspicious* is enunciated correctly.

| 206 **Ǻ tīm | rōūs fōe | ānd ǻ | sŭspī | cīōus frīend**

This combination forces the reader to a quickened pace through the final two feet. The companion verse is as expected from its reading:

| 205 **Ǻlike | rēsērv'd | tō blāme | ōr tō | cōmmēnd**

Although in a reading the change of foot in verse 206 would likely not be noticed, unless of course the iambic pentameter rhythm is being forced syllabically.

Verse 231:

| 231 ***Proud as Apollo on his forked hill,***
| 232 ***Sat full-blown Bufo, puff'd by ev'ry quill;***

This is only a note regarding verse 231 because it is not a metrical variation, but it could have readers stumped as to why it appears to not fit with the iambic rhythm. The answer lies in how the ending *-ed* was pronounced. At the time when Pope was writing, the *-ed* suffix was sounded and created another syllable. Today if required, we would render this differently by using the *grave-e* (è).

In general, the then *-d* would now be *-ed*, and *-ed* would now be *-èd*. Thus we would write *forkèd* to represent Pope's *forked*, and it would be pronounced as two syllables:

| 231 **Prōūd ās | Ǻpōl | lō ōn | hīs fōrk | èd hīll**

which is beautifully iambic.

The *-ed* suffix is a digraph and changes the meaning, normally to indicate the past tense and past participle of regular verbs. Today this suffix only adds a consonant sound (ed, d or t), not a syllable.

Verse 326:

326 *Amphibious thing! that acting either part,*
327 *The trifling head or the corrupted heart,*

Even with a casual reading, we will sense a quickness in *Amphibious thing*. These two words are read very quickly with an obvious two speech stresses. This is accounted for by the iamb and anapest with the metrical accent and speech stress arriving correctly on *thing*, highlighted also by the exclamation mark. The remainder of the verse consists of iambs.

326 **Āmphīb** | **ĩōus thīng** | **thăt āct** | **īng ě** | **thĕr pārt**

The companion verse is basically iambic:

327 **Thĕ trī** | **flīng hĕad** | **ōr thĕ** | **cōrrūpt** | **ĕd hĕart**

There may be some possible confusion in the third foot since we would not normally emphasize *the*. Yet its emphasis would give more dramatic effect and lean more to *corrupted*. In this case the iamb is appropriate. In a similar fashion *or* may be emphasized, creating the same effect. So a trochee is also plausible. However, the rhythm of the verse is more consistent with the third foot being an iamb with an increased speech stress on *the*.

Verse 343:

342 *That not for Fame, but Virtue's better end*
343 *He stood the furious foe, the timid friend,*

This is the second time we have met *furious*. The last was in verse 153 where we found the anapest coming into play. We can safely assume a similar appearance of the anapest since here too *furious* is followed by a single syllable word.

343 **Hĕ stōod** | **thĕ fūr** | **ĩōus fōe** | **thĕ tīm** | **īd frīend**

The anapest in the third foot creates as quicker reading and to the *extra* syllable in this foot is easily dealt with. Verse 342 is as expected being typical iambic pentameter:

| 342 **Thăt nōt | fōr Fāme | būt Vīr | tŭe's bēt | tēr ēnd**

Verse 351:

| 350 *The tale reviv'd, the lie so oft o'erthrown,*
| 351 ***Th' imputed trash, and dulness now his own;***

This is a note on the reading and pronunciation of this verse. It is not a metrical variation.

Clearly *Th' imputed* is using the elided form of *the* being *th'*. However, this is not sounded as a separate syllable. *Th' imputed* is pronounced as if it were one word, *thimputed*. Noting this, both verses are iambic pentameter.

| 350 **Thě tāle | rĕvīv'd | thě līe | sŏ ōft | o'ērthrōwn**
| 351 **Th' ĩmpūt | ěd trāsh | ānd dŭl | nĕss nōw | hīs ōwn**

Verse 386:

| 386 ***Unspotted names, and memorable long!***
| 387 *If there be force in Virtue, or in Song.*

A casual reading of this verse will have us place and unnatural stress on the third syllable of *memorable* to fit with the iambic rhythm. It does not make a great deal of difference, but does add something odd to the pronunciation. The verse renders as:

| 386 **Ŭnspōt | tĕd nāmes | ° ānd | mēmōrǎ | blĕ lōng**

Keeping with the natural speech stress, *memorable* has the dactyl for the first three syllables, and so avoids the unnatural and drawn out third syllable. It is unlikely that the cretic would appear in this foot due to unnatural stress. In this instance *memorable* does not take the *primus paeon* as one may be expecting.

| 386 **... mēmōrǎ | blĕ ...**

The other point of concern for the reader is that the comma is metrically timed for the iamb. Dramatic effect in the reading would require an emphasis on *and* both in terms of metrical accent and speech stress. So in this case, not technically a pause-foot.

The companion verse merrily skips along as a series of iambs:

| 387 **Īf thēre | bē fōrce | ĩn Vīr | tūe ōr | ĩn Sōng**

Verse 400:

| 400 ***By Nature honest, by Experience wise,***
| 401 ***Healthy by temp'rance, and by exercise;***

Simply by our reading we notice that the verse sounds to have some symmetry about it. We should also remember that this cannot be done with a purely iambic verse. So what is occurring here?

| 400 **Bŷ Nā | tūre hōnēst | ° bŷ | Ĕxpērī | ěnce wīse**

The effect is created by the two amphibrachs, one either side of a metrically timed comma. The result is that by the time we have overcome the metrical pause, it sounds like the verse has been split exactly in half.

The companion verse does not have a metrically timed comma due to the more pronounced iambic rhythm.

| 401 **Hēalthŷ | bŷ tēmp | 'rānce ānd | bŷ ēx | ěrcīse**

There are a few points to note with this verse. The beginning is a trochee foot which would be expected merely from the follow on from the previous verse. In the third foot, *and* has both metrical accent and speech stress to impart the importance of the inclusion of both *temp'rance* and *exercise*. Finally, there is a minor promoted stress on the last syllable of *exercise*, but this would scarcely be noticed.

Verse 410:

410 *With lenient arts extend a Mother's breath,*
411 *Make Languor smile, and smooth the bed of Death,*

From an initial reading, generally we would not stumble with this verse unless purposely forcing the iambic rhythm. (Yes, there are some who *read verse-by-verse, require a syllable count of ten and force the iambic rhythm.*)

We note that it all comes together, but we should also be able to tell that we have glossed quickly over *lenient arts*, and for a reason:

410 **With lē | nĭēnt ārts | ęxtēnd | ă Mōth | ęr's brēath**

By itself *lenient* would come as dactyl with its natural speech stress. However, it is not in the correct position to take on the dactyl foot. Instead, the anapest is found in the second foot which would make sense. The anapest provides a spritelier rhythm or a quicker sounding. All this allows us to keep the overall iambic rhythm, which is the only requirement.

As is mostly the case, the companion verse skips along as pure iambic.

411 **Măke Lān | guōr smīle | ănd smōoth | thĕ bēd | ۆf Dēath**

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