

The Dunciad

Book I

Verses 11, 12:

11 *Dulness o'er all possess'd her ancient right,*
12 *Daughter of Chaos and eternal night:*

If we look at this couplet with the intent of examining its *iambicity*, we find both unwanted promotion and demotion of *speech stress* conflicting with *metrical accent*. Thus we are tempted to say that this couplet is not pure *iambic pentameter*.

11 **Dŭlnĕss | ǒ'er āll | pössĕss'd | hĕr ān | ciĕnt rīght,**
12 **Dāughtĕr | ǒf Chā | ǒs ānd | ĕtĕr | nāl nīght:**

Naturally, there is no reason to have pure iambic pentameter verses, and some variation will be pleasing to the reader's ear. Even though the syllable count aligns with the alternating values, verse 11 in particular *sounds* too long.

The major point of concern is the promoted metrical accent on the second syllable of each line. In both verses the long syllable has been shortened and the short syllable lengthened resulting in an unnatural reading at the start. This then causes rhythmical confusion in the remainder of the verses.

Thus we may consider a valid trochaic beginning for each of these verses:

11 **Dŭlnĕss | ǒ'er āll | pössĕss'd | hĕr ān | ciĕnt rīght,**
12 **Dāughtĕr | ǒf Chā | ǒs ānd | ĕtĕr | nāl nīght:**

At first this seems quite appropriate, however the second verse still appears to have some rhythmical confusion with the trochaic foot.

We may see that a dactyl may be appropriate for the first foot, leading to two possible results, each involving a dactyl followed by trochee as one would expect:

| 12 Dāughtĕr ōf | Chā ōs | ānd ětĕr | nāl nīght:

| 12 Dāughtĕr ōf | Chā ōs | ānd ětĕr | nāl nīght:

The first involves a *cretic* in the third foot, and the second an *anapest* in the third foot. Both are appropriate depending on the reading. Yet we distinctly hear five *speech stresses* in this verse which would discount the ready with the anapest. It would seem that *and* requires a promoted *metrical accent*. Thus the cretic is a possibility.

The placement of the cretic comes under question due to a necessary pause before *and*. So the three syllable foot does not sit well in this verse. Hence it would appear that there are five feet, not just the four. However, the combination of dactyl and trochee create a wonderful and spirited beginning.

Having *and* with a promoted *metrical accent*, we find the vowel sound lengthen and a naturally occurring pause will result prior to this word introducing a *pause-foot* or *half-foot*:

| 12 Dāughtĕr ōf | Chā ōs | ānd | ětĕr | nāl nīght:

We may be tempted to say this is a *clipped iamb*, but it is metrically timing punctuation even though no punctuation symbol is used—it is implied and takes this on when the vowel is long. As a result, there are indeed five feet and both *speech stress* and *metrical accent* align producing a superb flow.

This combination may be given as dactyl, trochee followed by three iambs—all being valid substitutions.

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May, 2024

Green Iamb Publications

an imprint of

xiv lines