

The Rape of the Lock

Canto I

Analysis of Metrical Variations

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October 2024

This analysis uses the version from:

**The Twickenham Edition of the
Poems of Alexander Pope**
General Editor: John Butt

Volume II — The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems
The Five Canto Version of 1714
Edited by Geoffrey Tillotson
The Broadwater Press Ltd, 1963

Verses 17 & 18

- 17 *Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground,*
18 *And the press'd watch return'd a silver sound.*

The interesting point about this couplet is that each verse can be set down in pure iambic pentameter:

- 17 **Thrīce rūng | thĕ bĕll | thĕ slīp | pĕr knōck'd | thĕ grōund**
18 **Ānd thĕ | prĕss'd wāch | rĕtūrnĕd | ā sīl | vĕr sōund**

Albeit these verses sit satisfactorily, there is certainly something a little peculiar in their reading. The galloping rhythm of the iamb is monotonous and so lost in both lines giving an almost comical sound. To make sense of this, we need to look at verse 16; how it finishes and how it leads into the next verse.

- 16 **And sleepless Lovers, just at Twelve, awake:**

The presence of the colon suggests that *Thrice* would be better to stress in this instance due to the dramatic pause. There is also the point of having *rung the bell* come together to meet the pause of the punctuation (comma) which is not metrically timed.

- 17 ~ **Thrīce | rūng thĕ bĕll | thĕ slīp | pĕr knōck'd | thĕ grōund**

There is (and needs to be) a clipped iamb at the start to announce the rhythm. This is followed by the anapest which quickens the pace and after the comma there a slightly slower reading of the three iambs placing importance on the 'slipper knocking the ground'.

Notice that the five metrical accents have aligned perfectly with the speech stress to give the illusion of the presence of five iambs, but the iambic rhythm is not violated.

We find the same manner of construction for verse 18:

- 18 ~ **Ānd | thĕ prĕss'd wāch | rĕtūrnĕd | ā sīl | vĕr sōund**

There is an obvious emphasis on *And* acting as inclusion for 'the press'd watch'. Hence both verses match in construction and rhythm. The anapest is a valid substitution for the iamb and creates a slightly quicker reading than offered by the iamb itself. As we see, the alternative readings are far more appropriate than a string of pure iambs.

Verse 20

- 19 *Belinda still her downy Pillow prest,*
20 *Her Guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy Rest.*

Verse 19 is the typical iambic pentameter verse with all metrical accents and speech stresses perfectly aligned:

- 19 **Bĕlĭn | dă still | hĕr dōwn | ỳ Pil | lōw prĕst**

In verse 20, it does not take long to realize that the word *Guardian* is the point of concern. Clearly the verse finishes with a series of iambs, and we may assume that the first foot is also an iamb since any great emphasis on *Her* is not realistic—especially when we consider the entry after verse 19.

- 20 **Hĕr Guārd | ĭān Sỳlph | prōlōng'd | thĕ bālm | ỳ Rĕst**

We note the presence of the anapest in the second foot which enables the slightly quicker reading as opposed to that of iambs only. A pure iambic verse is not possible unless it was considered hexameter. But this would give an extremely unnatural reading. Metrical accents and speech stresses would be so misaligned that the result would be utterly absurd.

Verse 37

- 37 *Some secret Truths from Learned Pride conceal'd,*
38 *To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd:*

Verse 37 is not a metrical variation, but it requires the reader to be familiar with the *-ed* pronunciation. *Learned* is pronounced as two syllables as in today's *Learnèd*. Compare this with Pope's use of 'd which is equivalent to our *-ed* in most instances. Although it is still what may be called *Modern English* or *New English* (NE), there are still minor variations in pronunciation and spelling in what we call *Present Day English* (PDE).

Verse 48

- 47 *As now your own, our Being were of old,*
48 ***And once inclos'd in Woman's beauteous Mold;***

Verse 47 is a perfectly timed iambic pentameter verse:

- 47 **Ās nōw | yōur ōwn | ōur Bē | ĭngs wēre | ōf ōld**

As opposed to verse 48 which cannot be purely iambic:

- 48 **Ānd ōnce | ĭnclosed | ĭn Wōm | ān's bēau | tēōus Mōld**

We note that the anapest makes its appearance in the last foot. This substitution is common where a trisyllabic word appears before the next stressed word or syllable. Of course the anapest can replace the iamb in most feet and allows a faster reading of longer words so as to maintain the iambic rhythm and natural speech stress of the verse.

Verse 51

- 51 ***Think not, when Woman's transient Breath is fled,***
52 *That all her Vanities at once are dead:*

These verses render as:

- 51 **Thĭnk nōt | whĕn Wōm | ān's trāns | ĭĕnt Brēath | ĭs flēd**
52 **Thāt āll | hĕr Vān | ĭtĭēs | āt ōnce | āre dēad**

In this instance the anapest appears in the fourth foot, preceded and followed by an iamb where it sits comfortably.

It should be noted that the anapest will commonly fall in the positions of third to last foot. There are occasions when it will be well placed in the second foot.

In the occasions where a trisyllabic word is used, the anapest in some form, either the word itself or part of the word being the last two syllables will be taken in the foot. It enables a faster and more appropriate reading associated with the extra syllable.

As expected, the companion verse is a well formed iambic pentameter verse.

Verse 55

- 55 *Her Joy in gilded Chariots, when alive,*
56 *And Love from Ombre, after Death survive.*

We note that in these metrical variations, we find one verse being one syllable longer than its companion. This will mostly lead to the use of a trisyllable substitution. Lesser may involve the use of a clipped iamb.

Our attention is immediately drawn to *Chariots* bring three syllables and its position closer to the middle of the verse. Clearly the first and last foot are iambs:

- 55 **Hĕr Jōy | ĩn gĭld | ěd Chār | ĩōts whĕn | ălive**

Chariots cannot find its place as a sole dactyl, but is split with *when* to form the anapest. Metrical accents and speech stresses align and once again the anapest quickens the pace over the third and fourth feet.

As is frequently found, the companion verse is of a strict iambic pentameter:

- 56 **Ănd Lōve | ۆf Ōm | brĕ āf | tĕr Dĕath | sŭrvĭve**

Verse 77

- 77 **'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials know.**
78 **Tho' Honour is the Word with Men below.**

The interest in this verse centers on *Celestial*. As to whether or not this word is of interest depends on how you say it—with the correct three syllables or what sounds like four syllables.

It does not matter a great deal at all. The first will run a iambic pentameter, the second will involve a minor variation.

- 77 **'Tis bŭt | thĕĭr Sŷlph | thĕ wĭse | Cĕlĕs | tĭăl knōw**

The variation involves the use of the anapest in the final foot:

- 77 **'Tis bŭt | thĕĭr Sŷlph | thĕ wĭse | Cĕlĕs | tĭăl knōw**

Considering how both are read and how they sound, there is not a great deal of difference at all.

The companion verse is as expected:

- 78 **Thō' Hōn | ۆr ĩs | thĕ Wōrd | wĭth Mĕn | bĕlōw**

Verse 97

- 97 **When Florio speaks, what Virgin could withstand,**
98 If gentle Damon did not squeeze her Hand?

We would assume the *Florio* is where the variation will occur and with the possibility of the anapest.

- 97 **Whěn Flō | rĭō spēaks | whăt Vĭr | gĭn cōuld | wĭthstānd**

The anapest makes its appearance in the second foot associated with *Florio*. This is the earliest stage and anapest can safely appear in a verse.

Again, the companion verse follows in strict iambic meter:

- 98 **Īf gĕn | tlĕ Dā | mōn dĭd | nōt sqēeze | hĕr Hānd**

Verse 99

- 99 **With varying Vanities, from ev'ry Part,**
100 They shift the moving Toyshop of their Heart;

The variation in verse 99 is clearly to do with *varying*.

- 99 **Wĭth vār | yĭng Vān | ĭtĭēs | frōm ēv | rĭ Pārt**

The anapest appears in the second foot connecting *varying* and *Vanities*. The *formula*, so to speak, involving the anapest is very common.

We also note the eliding of *every* to *ev'ry*. The word itself is actually only two syllables, but it can be pronounced as three: *ev-er-y* depending on how the reader wishes to proceed. In this case, and others, it suits Pope for the metrical observance, and he indicates that it is pronounced as only two syllables.

As expected the companion verse follows in the usual manner:

- 100 **Thĕy Shĭft | thĕ mōv | ĭng Tōy | shōp ōf | thĕĭr Heārt**

Verse 106

- 105 Of these am I, who thy Protection claim,
106 **A watchful Sprite, and Ariel is my Name.**

As we have come to learn, three-syllable words or names generally indicate the presence of metrical variation.

- 106 **Ǻ wāтч | fŭl Sprĭte | ǻnd Ār | ĭĕl ĩs | mŷ Nāme**

It comes as no surprise with the name beginning with a stressed syllable, but generally (not always) the name will not appear as or in a sense foot. i.e. the name is split over consecutive metrical feet. So here, we do not expect to see *Ariel* as a dactyl. However, the anapest picks up the rhythm in the fourth foot.

Verse 105 is as we would expect and has very smooth albeit quick entry into verse 106:

- 105 **Ŏf thĕse | ǻm Ī | whŏ thŷ | Prŏtĕc | tĭŏn clāim**

Verse 113

- 113 **This to disclose is all thy Guardian can.**
114 Beware of all, but most beware of Man!

We have met *Guardian* before in verse 20 where the last two syllables formed the start of an anapest and appearing before a single syllable or word. It would be safe to assume a similar case here by nature of the word.

- 113 **This tŏ | dĭsclŏse | ĩs ǻll | thŷ Gŭard | ĭǻn cān**

And in this case the anapest occurs in the last foot. You may even say that it was predictable. The companion verse skips along beautifully in pure iambic pentameter:

- 114 **Bĕwāre | ŏf ǻll | bŭt mŏst | bĕwāre | ŏf Mān**

There is no metrically timed punctuation, but the comma does allow for the reasonable pause leading to the exclamation.

Verse 127

- 127 **Th'inferior Priestess, at her Altar's side,**
128 Trembling, begins the sacred Rites of Pride.

Note the pronunciation of *Th'inferior*. The elided form of *the* is used more for metrical adherence and so forms a single four-syllable word as in *thin-fe-ri-or*.

- 127 **Th'infē | rīōr | Priēstēss | āt hēr Āl | tār's sīde**

The anapest appears in the fourth foot without disrupting the rhythm. For verse 182:

- 128 **Trēmblīng | bēgīns | thē sā | crēd Rītes | ōf Prīde**

The comma is representing a break but is not metrically timed. It is actually pausing after the continuation from verse 127: *at her Altar's side trembling*. To maintain the rhythm, verse 128 requires the trochee beginning. However, this type of metrical substitution is quite common and is generally suggested by the natural speech stress.

Verse 130

- 129 Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here
130 **The various Off'rings of the World appear;**

It has been mentioned previously in verse 51 what possibilities may occur with the introduction of a three-syllable word. Now this occurs in the first foot but the likelihood of an anapest is slim, but verse 129 is as we would expect being typically iambic throughout:

- 129 **Ūnnūm | bēr'd Trēas | ūres ōpe | āt ōnce | ānd mōre**

It is the three-syllable *various* that attracts our attention:

- 130 **Thē vār | iōus Ōff | rīngs ōf | thē Wōrld | āppēar**

It is in the second foot that the anapest occurs in the same fashion we have noted previously, in that the first syllable is detached from the foot. This is due to the speech stress and also metrical accent that is placed on the first syllable. However, we note that the verse skips along as would typically be expected of the normal iambic rhythm.

Verse 131

131 From each she nicely culls with curious Toil,
132 And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring Spoil.

Again the presence of a three-syllable word among basically single syllable words calls for attention and it is the anapest in the last foot associated with *curious*:

131 Frōm ēach | shē nīce | lŷ cūlls | wīth cū | rīōus Tōil

Apart from the foot placement, the anapest is positioned across the syllables in the same way as *various* in verse 130.

Verse 132 is of course the normal and expected iambic pentameter.

132 Ānd dēcks | thē Gōd | dēss wīth | thē glitt | rīng Spōil

Verses 133 & 134

133 This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,
134 And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box.

In most cases a rarity for Pope, in that both verses have a minor variation. We cannot help but assume that an anapest will come into play with the presence of *India* and *Arabia*. Both of these would not sit well solely as iambs.

133 Thīs Cās | kēt Īnd | iā's glōw | īng Gēms | ūnlōcks

and

134 Ānd āll | Ārāb | iā brēathes | frōm yōn | dēr Bōx

both show the identical construction with the anapest in the third foot. It is interesting to note that where both verses contained variations, the construction of the verses is identical as was with verses 17 and 18. Doing so gives consistency to the flow between and across the verses and is less likely to interrupt the overall iambic rhythm.

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