
WORKING WITH POPE

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THE DUNCIAD BOOK I—VERSES 15, 17

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VERSE 15

15 Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind,
16 She rul'd, in native Anarchy, the mind.

The temptation in most readings knowing Pope's form is to immediately place a metrical accent on every second syllable assuming that it is likely iambic pentameter. With this closed couplet, it goes well to a point, in this case to busy, but the wheels fall off, and honestly they were a tad wobbly after *laborious*.

If we attempt to dictate the metrics, we run the risk of destroying any rhythm in the verse, unless we are well-tuned to the metrics. In this verse, we cannot *force* it into *iambic pentameter*.

15 Lăbōr | řoūs | hēavŷ | būsŷ | bōld ānd | blīnd

Just does not work! We notice that not only is the metrical accent in conflict with the speech stress, when scanning there is one word/syllable unaccounted for at the very end.

Blind is marked as either long or short (stressed or unstressed) because the current scansion leaves it questionable. However, reading the verse the alliteration toward the end leaves us with the clear impression that the last syllable is long (stressed). There is also a distinct pause after busy. This is created by the trochee: **būsŷ**, and leaves us somewhat wanting before proceeding to the next long syllable: **bōld**. Alliteration also plays its part here to gather the rhythm.

15 Laborious (?) | hēavŷ | būsŷ | ° bōld | ānd blīnd

It remains to determine the nature of laborious. We clearly hear at least one major metrical accent aligning with the speech stress at **-bō-**. There may be another of lesser significance at **-oūs-**. The remainder are definitely shorter.

15 Lăbō | řioūs | hēavŷ | būsŷ | ° bōld | ānd blīnd

What to do with *laborious*? Promoting the metrical accent on the last syllable leads to an iambic pentameter verse. However, that rhythm is not quite there due to the quicker way we would say *laborious*, and the metrical promotion starts to sound very strange. Thus *laborious* over two metrical feet does not seem appropriate with an expected pause before heavy. It would appear that only the five feet and not six are necessary.

15 Lăbōrīoūs | hēavŷ | būsŷ | ° bōld | ānd blīnd

Now we have something very different. The *paeon* is not common, but it certainly is not rare in English poetry. It requires the right word which is spoken at the right speed. In this instance it is the *secundus paeon* (metrical accent on the second syllable), and it sits perfectly with the natural speech stress. Most times it will be followed by a trochee to pick up the rhythm, perhaps a dactyl in rare instances.

One may be tempted for the *diiamb* ($\sim \text{---} \sim \text{---}$), but this would require a more noticeable speech stress on the last syllable to justify its use. It is extremely rare to see the diiamb in English poetry, if at all.

It is not what you would call a substitution for the iamb, but it is not intended to be. Its presence is developed by the following trochees and pause foot. A beautiful combination to say the least, giving the verse that punching effect as the adjectives come into play.

Its companion verse on the other hand is a very standard iambic pentameter line. Notice how the rhythm is very different, but still complements the first verse.

16 Shě rūl'd | ĩn nā | tĭve Ān | ārchŷ | thě mīnd

Again, it is import to pre-read a poem to gauge the intent of the poet. In some cases it may be ambiguous, and perhaps that is how it is meant to be. It's all in how you read it.

VERSE 17

17 Still her old Empire to restore she tries,
18 For, born a Goddess, Dulness never dies.

This verse depends on your liking for the start. Some may strike with still, and others with her. However, we may also be satisfied with a verse of iambs by promoting 'her':

17 Stīll hēr | ōld Ēm | pĭre tō | rĕstōre | shĕ trĭes

This may well be the way the verse should read. If we promote still, we really need a pause or a foot separating still from her. This is all in one's interpretation.

17 Stīll hēr | ōld Ēm | pĭre tō | rĕstōre | shĕ trĭes

On closer examination, we may satisfy ourselves with a verse of iambs. The reason is that this will make better sense in that promoting still has a wanting pause after. This requires a quicker pace to cover the middle of the verse, and so is more exclamatory.

The trochee start although doable, seems to lack grace and charm in this instance. This version has a more exclamatory nature to it, but Pope does not indicate such a thing. However, we are at liberty to interpret the verse differently. Whichever way, without a doubt, promotion of still or her will lead to slightly different meanings, albeit that difference

is minor.

This is what happens to the verse if we decide to pause after the previous line:

17 ~ Still | hēr ōld | Ēmpīre | tō rēstōre | shē trīes

The reading produces a different interpretation, but not an inappropriate one. It manages to align the rhythm somewhat better with the clipped iamb in the first foot, and anapest in the fourth giving to restore a smoother slow. The companion verse then comes as a revelation of sorts in the typically expected iambic pentameter:

18 Fōr bōrn | ā Gōd | dēss Dūl | nēss nēv | ěr dīes

Whatever the valid substitution for an iamb, it will always require careful reading to keep the rhythm of the verse. We notice that there is some awkwardness in the verses when forcing the iambic rhythm due to the presence of three-syllable feet. After identifying and controlling them, we find there is no loss of rhythm at all.