

WORKING WITH POPE

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The Rape of the Lock

Metrical Analysis by Ferrick Gray

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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

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Prefatory Note

What follows has been stated before, but it will not hurt as a reminder of what these metrical analyses are about.

No-one can dispute the fact that Pope was the master of the riming couplets. He wrote most of his work in what we may now call *heroic couplets* which are written in *iambic pentameter*. As anyone who has written in this form will attest, there are certain times when a variation must occur in the verse.

Variations are generally a substitution for the iamb. Hence we may find an **amphibrach**, **anapest** or **dactyl** taking the place of an iamb within the verse. Of course this does not exclude the **trochee** which commonly may lead the verse.

When undertaking these metrical analyses, it is not a matter of being critical. It is to identify the variation, explain why it has been used and what the effect on the verse may be. In other words, *why verses are as they are and not otherwise*.

Canto II of The Rape of the Lock will be the focus for this second in the series of analyses.

Metrical Analysis and Comments

Verse 27

27 Fair Tresses Man's Imperial Race insnare,
28 And Beauty draws us with a single Hair.

Here we observe that the four-syllable **Imperial** may be the source of variation.

27 Făir Trēss | ēs Mān's | Īmpērī | ăl Rāce | ĩnsnāre

The **amphibrach** in the third foot sits very well and gives a symmetry to the verse. That is, the amphibrach surrounded by iambs on each side. Note that given the appropriate word an anapest would also have worked, but definitely not a dactyl. As for verse 28:

28 Ānd Bēau | tŷ drāws | ūs wĭth | ă sĭn | glē Hāir

it merrily skips along in strict iambic pentameter.

Verse 29

29 Th' Adventrous *Baron* the bright Locks admir'd,
30 He saw, he wish'd, and to the Prize apir'd:

We would assume that **adventrous**, itself the eliding of **adventurous** will be the position of variation in the verse.

29 ~ Th'(ē) | Ādvēn | trōūs Bārōn | thē brĭght Lōcks | ădmĭr'd

This is an unusual construction for Pope, but it still sits well with the rhythm and we can hear five speech stresses when reading. Eliding **the** can seem somewhat of a problem because it is clearly stressed at the start. However, for the five metrical accents to align with the five speech stresses, it must be a clipped iamb. Basically we have a *headless* verse. Its place is noted by the introduction of the **amphibrach** followed by **anapest**, but still to finish with an iamb. Simply by reading the verse we can feel that *pause* which is necessary after **Baron**.

Verse 30 in a stunning iambic pentameter verse:

30 Hē sāw | hē wĭsh'd | ănd tō | thē Prĭze | ăspĭr'd

Verse 67

67 While ev'ry Beam new transient Colours flings,
68 Colours that change whene'er they wave their Wings.

This is a variation in meter and verse 67 and 68 are both classified as iambic pentameter. The iambicity of verse 67 depends greatly on your pronunciation of **transient**. Some would pronounce it as the three-syllable **trans-i-ent** whereas it is only a two-syllable word **tran-sient**.

67 Whĭle ēv | rŷ Bēam | nēw trān | sĭēnt Cōl | ōurs flĭngs

A similar thing occurs with the word **every**. Some will pronounce it as **ev-er-y** giving it three syllables whereas it is only a two-syllable word **eve-ry**. Pope chooses to avoid any misunderstanding by eliding **every** to be sure of the two-syllable pronunciation.

Verse 68 does have a minor change at the start being the trochee as the iamb would be inappropriate can create and unwanted emphasis on the second syllable.

68 Cōlōurs | thăt chānge | whēne'ēr | thěy wāve | thěir Wīngs

Note the British spelling **colours** in these verses.

Verse 70

69 Amid the Circle, on the gilded Mast,
70 **Superior by the Head, was *Ariel* plac'd;**

Verse 69 is the expected iambic pentameter with a medial caesura at the comma, being a traditional caesura since it breaks the metrical foot.

69 Āmīd | thě Cīr | clē ̃ōn | thě gīld | ěd Māst

It comes as no surprise that it should be the four-syllable **superior** producing the variation in verse 70.

70 Sŭpērī | ōr bŷ | thě Hēad | wās Ār | ĩēl plāc'd

The other point of interest is the verse length being slightly longer. There are five metrical feet, but two of them are three-syllable feet creating the longer verse. Yet as we note, the verse still retains its rhythm, starting with the **amphibrach** and finishing with the **anapest**. The three iambs between work in maintaining the iambic rhythm. We also find what appears to be a *slant-rime*—**Mast, plac'd**. Even though the -'d would sound as -t, there is still a difference in the sounding of the vowel. Pope does not do this often, but we should also be aware that in some instances, not this, that words have changed in pronunciation over the years.

Verse 71

71 **His Purple Pinions opening to the Sun,**
72 He rais'd his Azure Wand, and thus begun.

The one word in question, being syllabically longer than any other in this verse is **opening**, so we would expect something around this position in the verse.

71 Hīs Pŭr | plē Pīn | ĩōns ōpēn | ĩng tō | thě Sŭn

Indeed, we find the **amphibrach** performing in much the same way an anapest would mid-verse, and that is the the word is split at the first or second syllable with the remainder appearing in the next foot.

Verse 72 continues as we would expect:

72 Hě rāis'd | hīs Āz | ūre Wānd | ānd thūs | bēgŭn

Verses 75 & 76

75 Ye know the Spheres and various Tasks assign'd
76 By Laws Eternal, to th' Aerial Kind.

In a similar fashion, we may point to **various** as the position for the variation in this verse.

75 Yě knōw | thě Sphēres | ānd vār | iōūs Tāsks | āssign'd

This time it is the last two syllables of **various** forming the **anapest** with **Tasks**. The speed and position with which the anapest appears disguises its three-syllable self, and in no way disrupts the iambic meter of the verse.

Unusual for Pope, but we find that the companion verse also contains a minor variation:

76 Bŷ Lāws | Ětēr | nāl tō | th'(ě) Āerī | āl Kīnd

Produced by **Aerial** along with the eliding of **the** to **th'**. Clearly Pope did not want the full sounding that the **e** produces in **the**. It may be pronounced as in **thee** or **thuh** depending where you have been taught. **Thuh** has more the pronunciation required here, and the **amphibrach** takes care of the matter.

Verse 92

91 Our humbler Province is to tend the Fair,
92 Not a less pleasing, tho' less glorious Care.

The companion verse 91 is the expected iambic pentameter:

91 Ōur hūm | blēr Prōv | ĩnce īs | tō tēnd | thě Fāir

and in verse 92 we assume that **glorious** may be the point of variation.

92 Nōt ā | lěss plēas | ĩng thō' | lěss glō | rīōūs Cāre

So the last two syllables in **glorious** make up the anapest foot with **Care**. We should also note the **trochee** start. Undue emphasis on **a** would come as very out of place.

Verse 116

115 Do thou, *Crispissa*, tend her fav'rite Lock;
116 *Ariel* himself shall be the Guard of *Shock*.

The companion verse 115 is again the expected iambic pentameter:

115 Dō thōu | Crīspīs | sǎ tēnd | hēr fāv' | rīte Lōck

Verse 116 has something a little different due to the name **Ariel** appearing at the start:

116 Ārīēl | hīmsēlf | shall bē | thě Gūard | ōf Stōck

Here we see **Ariel** as a **dactyl**, which is appropriate for a name, but we may also see it as an **anapest** with the emphasis coming before **himself**:

| 116 Ārīēl | hīmsēlf | shall bē | thē Gūard | ōf Stōck

this scansion would actually be the better of the two for any dramatic effect.

Final Comments

For much of this canto, Pope has closely adhered to the expected **strict iambic pentameter**. This is to be expected because of his prowess in heroic couplets. The variations are those which are permitted and there is nothing out of the ordinary. In some cases we find that the variation may be due to pronunciation, but this is to be expected. The reader too, needs to be flexible in how the verses are read aloud.

As we find with such variations, in general, it is only one of the companion verses that involves a variation. On some occasions we find that both verses mirror a similar variation, but this is not very common with Pope. Overall, he keeps to form.