

Metrical Feet

Iamb (iambic)	betray
Anapest (anapestic)	intercede
Trochee (trochaic)	stupor
Dactyl (dactylic)	secondly
Spondee (spondaic)	stop light
Pyrrhic	a night / for the / ghosts

Some Other Metrical Concerns

caesuras
end-stopped vs. enjambed lines
rhyme

“It is not meters, but a meter-making argument that makes a poem.”
Emerson

“[Meter] can’t be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense.” Pound

According to Paul Fussell in *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, there are three principles of expression that metric variations convey:

- 1 A succession of stressed syllables without the expected intervening unstressed syllables can reinforce effects of slowness, weight, or difficulty;
- 2 A succession of unstressed syllables without the expected intervening stressed syllables can reinforce effects of rapidity, lightness, or ease;
- 3 An unanticipated reversal in rhythm implies a sudden movement, often of discovery or illumination; or a new direction of thought, a new tone of voice, or a change or intensification of poetic address.

Some Examples

Listen! / you hear / the gra / ting roar /

Of peb / bles which / the waves / draw back, / and fling, /

At their / return, / up the / high strand, /

Begin, / and cease, / and then / again / begin / (Arnold, "Dover Beach")

. . . . through many a dark and dreary Vale

They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,

O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alp,

Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death. (*PL*)

Drove them before him Thunder-struck, pursu'd
With terrors and with furies to the bounds
And Crystal wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,
Roll'd inward, and a spacious Gap disclos'd
Into the wasteful Deep; the monstrous sight
Strook them with hoo backward, but far worse
Urg'd them behind; headlong themselves they threw
Down from the verge of Heav'n, Eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit. (*PL*)

I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,

And with forc'd fingers rude,

Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year. (*Lycidas*)

So scoffing in ambiguous words, he scarce
Had ended; when to right and left the front
Divided, and to either flank retired.
Which to our eyes discovered new and strange,
A triple mounted row of pillars laid
On wheels (for like to pillars most they seemed
Or hollowed bodies made of oak or fir,
With branches lopped, in wood or mountain felled)

Brass, iron, stony mould, had not their mouths

With hideous orifice gaped on us wide,

Portending hollow truce; at each behind

A seraph stood, and in his hand a reed

Stood waving tipped with fire; while we suspense,

Collected stood within our thoughts amused,

Not long, for sudden all at once their reeds

Put forth, and to a narrow vent applied

With nicest touch. Immediate in a flame,

But soon obscured with smoke, all heaven appeared,
From those deep throated engines belched, whose roar
Embowelled with outrageous noise the air,
And all her entrails tore, disgorging foul

Their devilish glut, chained thunderbots and hail

Of iron globes, which on the victor host

Levelled, with such impetuous fury smote,

That whom they hit, none on their feet might stand,

Though standing else as rocks, but down they fell

By thousands, angel on archangel rolled;

The sooner for their arms, unarmed they might

Have easily as spirits evaded swift

By quick contraction or remove; but now

Foul dissipation followed and forced rout;

Nor served it to relax their serried files. (*PL*, VI, 568-99)

Thus Eve with countenance blithe her story told;

But in her cheek distemper flushing glowed.

On the other side, Adam, soon as he heard

The fatal trespass done by Eve, amazed,

Astonied stood and blank, while horror chill

Ran through his veins, and all his joints relaxed;

From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve

Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed:

Speechless he stood and pale, till thus at length

First to himself he inward silence broke. (*PL*, IX, 886-95)