

Greek and Latin Metre VI

The Iambic Trimeter I: Greek

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|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| μέτρα: | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| πόδες: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ⏏ | — | | ⏏ | — | | ⏏ | ⋮ | — | | ⏏ | ⋮ | — | | ⏏ | — | | ⏏ | ⏏ |

- The iambic trimeter consists of three sets of the iambic metron (⏏—), itself a repeated version of the iambic foot (⏏—), with scope for an opening *anceps*. The trimeter can thus also be conceived of as six iambic feet, although this is less faithful to ancient metrical theories.
- The verse form also sprung from the Ionian tradition, like the dactylic hexameter and pentameter.
- The metre is stichic, and is therefore typically found as part of a continual sequence of identical lines, continued for as long as the author desired and without a closing coda.
- The iambic trimeter is attested very early in the comic poem *Margites* of the ‘Homeric corpus’ (now lost), which mixed hexameters and iambic trimeters.
- The metre is named after the ἴαμβος, scurrilous poetry of satirical invective, made especially famous by Hipponax (6th cent. B.C.).
- From the late sixth century B.C., the iambic trimeter was employed as the typical verse form for (spoken) dialogue in (specifically Attic) drama, both tragedy and comedy. This proved to be much the most famous context for the metre, and the refinement of the line by Attic tragedians is taken to be the most perfected instantiation of the metrical form.
- Cf. Arist. *Ars Poetica* 1449a: αὐτὴ ἡ φύσις τὸ οἰκεῖον μέτρον εὔρε· μάλιστα γὰρ λεκτικὸν τῶν μέτρων τὸ ἰαμβεῖον ἐστίν· σημεῖον δὲ τούτου, πλεῖστα γὰρ ἰαμβεῖα λέγομεν ἐν τῇ διαλέκτῳ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ἑξάμετρα δὲ ὀλιγάκις καὶ ἐκβαίνοντες τῆς λεκτικῆς ἀρμονίας.

Some Iambic (Trimetric) Openings:

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Archil. fr. 215 | καί μ’ οὔτ’ ἰάμβων οὔτε τερπωλέων μέλει. |
| [Hom.] <i>Margites</i> fr. 1.3 | φίλαις ἔχων ἐν χερσὶν εὐφθογγον λυρήν. |
| Eur. <i>Med.</i> 1 | εἴθ’ ὦφελ’ Ἀργούης μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος |
| Ar. <i>Lys.</i> 1 | ἄλλ’ εἴ τις εἰς Βακχεῖον αὐτὰς ἐκάλεσεν |

Iambs vs spondees:

- In the first, third and fifth feet of the verse (or the first two syllables of each metron) a spondaic rhythm can stand in lieu of the underlying iambic rhythm.
- *brevis in longo* can occur at the close of the verse, where there was a natural pause.
- (For the further complication of resolved syllables in the line, see below.)

Caesurae:

- The iambic trimeter requires a caesura; in the small percentage of cases where it appears to lack a caesura, one generally finds a 'quasi-caesura' (*on which see below*).
- The most typical caesura is after the fifth element of the verse, i.e. between the first (anceps) and second (always long) syllables of the second metron. This is known as the 'penthemimeral' caesura. In archaic (pre-dramatic) iambic trimeters, this accounts for some 75% of caesurae; in drama the figure is rather 80-90% in its favour. E.g.:

Soph. *Phil* 1 ἀκτὴ μὲν ἦδε ἰ τῆς περιρρύτου χθονὸς

- It is possible, however, for the caesura to occur later in the second metron, namely after the seventh element, i.e. between the third (always short) and fourth (always long) syllables. This is known as the 'hepthemimeral' caesura. E.g.:

Soph. *OT* 3 ἰκτηρίοις κλάδοισιν ἰ ἐξεστεμμένοι

- Elision is rare at the caesura, except with cases of δέ and similarly weak particles.
- If a proclitic precedes, or an enclitic / postpositive follows, word division at either the penthemimeral or the hepthemimeral position, the natural coalescence of the two words usually deprives the caesura of force (exceptions are rare).
- **However**, it is possible for elision to allow the licence of the so-called 'quasi-caesura' (or *caesura media*): if elision occurs after the sixth element, i.e. in the middle of the second metron (and of the trimeter as a whole), the line can be treated as if the *elided* syllable took the line to its penthemimeral caesura. E.g.

Aesch. *Ag.* 20 ὦν δ' εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἰ ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων.

Eur. *Suppl.* 1 Δήμητερ ἐστιούχ' ἰ Ἐλυσινοσ χθονός

This licence occurs in only 2% of Aeschylean and 1% of Sophoclean and Euripidean trimeters.

- This quasi-caesura is usually secured by elision, but in a small number of cases no such elision occurs at the middle of the line. The lines are 'non-caesural' or reflect a very rare licence: 20 such lines occur in Aesch., 11 in Sophocles and 4 (potentially 0?) in Euripides.

Eur. *Suppl.* 699 καὶ συμπατάξαντες ἰ μέσον πάντα στρατόν

Pauses:

- Sense pause is commonest at line end (accounting for 50-60%); another 25% occur at one of the two caesurae; the remainder (15-25%) typically occur in the first metron, punctuation being relatively rare in the third.

Antilabe:

- This is the technical term for the change of speaker within a line.
- The licence, unknown to Aeschylus, is increasingly regular in Sophocles and Euripides, e.g.:

Eur. *Or.* 1235 ΟΡ· ἔκτεινα μητέρ', ΠΥ· ἠψάμην δ' ἐγὼ ξίφους.

- The change can occur more than once in a line, e.g.:

Eur. *Alc.* 391 ΑΔ· τί δρῶς; προλείπεις; ΑΛ· χαῖρ' ΑΔ· ἀπωλόμην τάλας.

- The change can occur at any point in the verse, except before the final syllable of the trimeter.
- N.B. One speaker can cause the elision of a preceding speaker (see last example).

Porson's Law:

- There exists a very important rule about the division of words at the close of the line: a final word of cretic shape (—υ—; or of trochaic shape + a monosyllable) should not be preceded by a long syllable that is not a monosyllable; rather a short must stand in this anacrusis (opening the third metron). The rule can be represented schematically at line end as:

... — | — — υ —

- E.g.: acceptable is Soph. *El.* 19 καὶ τῶ λέγοντι καὶ κλύοντι σύμμαχος
unacceptable would be *καὶ τῶ λέγοντι καὶ κλύοντι ξύμμαχος

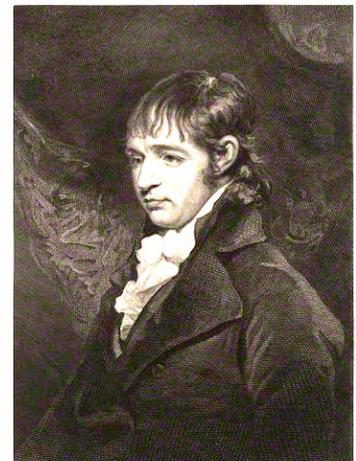
Apparent exceptions to the rule can be explained away by three further considerations:

- (i) Elision can obviate the breach, e.g. Soph. *Aj.* 1101 ἔξεστ' ἀνάσσειν ὧν ὄδ' ἠγείτ' οἴκοθεν .
- (ii) οὐδείς was considered exempt from the rule when preceding the cretic, perhaps because taken as οὐδ' εἶς; e.g. Eur. *Alc.* 671 ἦν δ' ἔγγυς ἔλθη θάνατος, οὐδείς βούλεται
- (iii) Occasionally, if the first element of the cretic unit (—υ—) is the definite article, Porson's Law can be disregarded, e.g. Eur. *Cycl.* 210 τί φατε; τί λέγετε; τάχα τις ὑμῶν τῶ ξύλω

Other apparent breaches of the rule that do not conform with these criteria for exemption are in reality textual corruptions. The solution to the most famous such crux, Eur. *Ion* 1, is unclear:

† Ἄτλας ὁ χαλκίοισι νώτοις οὐρανόν †

- The rule was not observed by the earliest iambographers.
- It was discovered by Richard Porson in 1797 ad Eur. *Hec.* 347, and developed in his *Supplementum ad Praefationem* (Cambridge, 1802) pp.xxiv, xxx ff.



Hiatus:

- Hiatus, though common in dactylic metres, is allowed in iambic trimeters only after exclamations / interjections, e.g.:

Aesch. *Ag.* 1257: ὅτοτοῖ, Λύκει' Ἀπολλων, οἱ ἔγώ, ἔγώ.

- N.B. Occasionally an exclamation is inserted between lines as a stand-alone utterance, whether interrupting the speaker's own narrative or that of an interlocutor. E.g.:

Eur. *Or.* 1155 φεῦ·

Eur. *Alc.* 28 ἄ ἄ ἄ ἄ

Soph. *OT* 1471 ἰθ' ὦναξ;

In such instances hiatus is observed (or, alternatively put, such extra-metric insertions do not observe synaphea).

Syllabic resolution and substitution:

- The schema given on p.1 applies to a standard iambic trimeter. However, there existed the possibility – primarily in the first two metra, and especially in the first – for deviation from this basic pattern. Below are the possibilities of syllabic variation in the line, based upon the practice of the Attic tragedians.
- All of the long (i.e. even-numbered) syllables marked in the schema – with the exception of the last – could be replaced by two shorts, on the notion (seen in reverse in the dactylic hexameter) that ∪∪ and – were metrically equivalent. E.g.:

Eur. *Bacch.* 57 ἐκόμισα παρέδρους καὶ ξυνεμπόρους ἐμοί

- It is important to note that, when such resolution occurs, the resulting two shorts must belong to the same word (or unified word group): not ἔπος ὅσιος νῦν... but ὅσιος ἔπος νῦν.
- Generally speaking, the scope for metrical variety via resolution decreases as the line progresses. If an instance does occur in the third metron (in the fifth foot), the preceding anceps must be short, thus creating a fifth-foot tribrach, e.g.:

Soph. *Aj.* 459 ἔχθει δὲ Τροία πᾶσα καὶ πεδία τάδε

- However, much the most common place for resolution is in the first half of the second metron, i.e. of the sixth element. E.g.:

Eur. *Hipp.* 614 ἀπέπτυσ' οὐδεὶς ἄδικός ἐστί μοι φίλος.

- Resolution occurs in just under 10% of lines of the early iambographers (in the case of Solon and Semonides in under 2%). In the Attic tragedians, it occurs in 8% of Aeschylus' trimeters, 5% of Sophocles' and 5% of Euripides' early plays; by the end of Eur.'s career, however, the figure is a resolution in more than 1 / 3 verses (i.e. c. 35%).
- Euripides, who was thus the freest metrician of the tragedians, occasionally allows the two shorts of a resolved syllable to belong to two words that are closely related, e.g.:

Eur. *Ion* 931 τί φῆς; τίνα λόγον Λοξίου κατηγορεῖς;

Eur. *Supp.* 158 τί δὲ πλέον; ἦλθον Ἀμφιάρεω γε πρὸς βίαν

- Further permutations of metre are possible in the first metron. The initial anceps, though its initial (iambic) character means that it was a single short in origin, can be replaced by two shorts, provided that (i) the following long is not resolved, and (ii) the opening word is of three

or more syllables in length (and thus undivided). The result is an anapaestic (∪∪–) opening to the line, e.g.:

Eur. *Bacch.* 40 ἄτέλεστον οὔσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων

- Occasionally, in the case of a (metrically intractable) proper noun, this same licence – of creating an anapaestic foot within the metron – can be extended to elsewhere in feet 2-5: such instances elsewhere in the line account for 3% of Aesch.’s, 15% of Eur.’s and 21% of Soph.’s ‘anapaestic’ resolutions. However, this licence in resolution is markedly commoner in Euripides than in Aeschylus and Sophocles.
- *Very* rarely (under ten cases in extant tragedy) an even more intractable proper noun can be responsible for an opening metron of choriambic shape –∪∪–, i.e. one which has suffered ‘anaclassis’ (metrical reversal) of its first and second elements, e.g.:

Aesch. *Sept.* 488 Ἴππομέδοντος σχῆμα καὶ μέγας τύπος

- Plural resolutions can occur in a line, most commonly in Euripides, e.g.;

Eur. *El.* 61 ἐξέβαλέ μ’ οἴκων, χάριτα τιθεμένη πόσει

The full possible schema for the tragic trimeter is thus:

∪ – | ∪ – | ∪ ∷ – | ∪ ∷ – | ∪ – | ∪ ∪
 ∪ ∪ | ∪ ∪ | ∪ ∷ ∪ | ∪ ∷ ∪ | ∪ ∪∪ | ∪ ∪
 ∪ – – | – ∪ –

Iambic Synaphea & Hypermetre?

- Since the iambic trimeter is stichic, the verse does not generally observe synaphea.
- However, in a small number of cases a monosyllabic proclitic may close a line. E.g.:

Aesch. *Eum.* 238-9 προστετριμμένον τε πρὸς || ἄλλοισιν οἴκοις

Soph. *Ant.* 171-2 παίσαντές τε καὶ || πληγέντες

- More remarkably, in 8 instances Sophocles (alone) allows the elision of an enclitic / postpositive at the close of the line (almost always τε and δέ, but once ταῦτα at). E.g.:

Soph. *OT* 29-30 μέλας δ’ || ἼΑιδης

Soph. *OT* 332-3 τί ταῦτ’ || ἄλλως ἐλέγχεις;

Comic Variations:

- Although the iambic trimeter was also the typical verse form for the dialogue of Greek comedy (Old and New), it was employed in a freer fashion than its tragic counterpart, no doubt to convey greater colloquial colour and a sense of relaxed informality. Its significant differences from the tragic trimeter are as follows:
- Porson’s Law is not observed in about 20% of verses.

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|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Soph. <i>OT</i> 13 | εἶην τοιάνδε μὴ οὐ κατοικτείρων ἔδραν |
| Soph. <i>OT</i> 368 | εἶπερ τί γ' ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας σθένος |
| Hippoxax fr.29 | δύ' ἡμέραι γυναικός εἰσιν ἡδισταί |
| Ar. <i>Nub.</i> 21 | φέρ' ἴδω τί ὀφείλω; δώδεκα μνάς Πασίᾱ |