

Meter in English Poetry

The meters with two-syllable feet are

IAMBIC (x /) : That **time** of **year** thou **mayst** in **me** behold

TROCHAIC (/ x): **Tell** me **not** in **mournful** **numbers**

SPONDAIC (/ /): **Break, break, break/** On thy **cold gray** stones, O Sea!

Meters with three-syllable feet are

ANAPESTIC (x x /): And the **sound** of a **voice** that is **still**

DACTYLIC (/ x x): **This** is the **forest** primeval, the **murmuring** **pin**es and the **hem**lock
(a trochee replaces the final dactyl)

Each line of a poem contains a certain number of feet of iambs, trochees, spondees, dactyls or anapests. A line of one foot is a monometer, 2 feet is a dimeter, and so on--trimeter (3), tetrameter (4), pentameter (5), hexameter (6), heptameter (7), and octameter (8). The number of syllables in a line varies therefore according to the meter.

From "An Essay on Criticism"

by Alexander Pope

True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance,
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense.
Soft is the Strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers flows;
But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,
The hoarse, rough Verse shou'd like the Torrent roar.
When Ajax strives, some Rocks' vast Weight to throw,
The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;
(iambic pentameter)

From "Evangeline"

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
(dactylic hexameter)