

Spondee

Definition

- A *spondee* is a metrical foot consisting of two stressed syllables,
 - This makes it unique in English verse as all other feet (excepting molossus, which has three stressed syllables, and dispondee, which has four stressed syllables) contain at least one unstressed syllable.
 - This meter was the one originally used in chants accompanying libations, so the word comes from *sponde*, meaning "solemn libation, a drink-offering,"
 - Examples from English poetry that are indisputable can be tricky to find since the stresses on the words depend on the reader's interpretation.
 - It is unrealistic to construct a whole, serious poem with spondees; consequently, spondees mainly occur as variants within an anapaestic (u u /) structure.

Examples

from G. K. Chesterton, "Lepanto"

White founts falling in the courts of the sun
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run;

Analysis:

The basic template for both lines is anapaestic tetrameter: four feet, each consisting of two short syllables then a long syllable (duh-duh-DAH, duh-duh-DAH, duh-duh-DAH, duh-duh-DAH). It is then heavily modified: The second, third and fourth feet in the second line each have three instead of two short syllables (duh-duh-duh-DAH). The first anapaest in the first line is replaced with a spondee ("White founts," DAH-DAH). The second anapaest in the first line is replaced with a trochee (DAH-duh).

from Othello

If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,

Note: "heart-strings" is awkward to pronounce iambically and is probably best scanned as a spondee.

Helpful Links:

This website lists English words that naturally fall into spondees, iambs, trochees, dactyls, and anapests. This way, anyone interested can compare and contrast and see the exact differences between all of the different types of metrical feet.

<http://web.cn.edu/KWHEELER/documents/Examples%20of%20Iambs.pdf>

This next website also explains the differences between spondees and other literary terms relating to meter and stressed/unstressed syllables.

<http://www.expansivepoetryonline.com/journal/prospart2.html>