

## The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A Metrical Analysis

During Sylvia Plath's career as a poet, although the main bulk of it lasted only from around 1956 until her death in February of 1963, this poet produced a body of work comprised of more than two hundred poems, utilizing a wide range of poetic styles and devices. Throughout this period, Plath continued to work with a number of metrical structures, never rejecting a particular format entirely, or conversely, limiting herself to a single meter or metrical style. There is, however, evidence that, as she developed as a poet, Plath began to experiment extensively with a given structure for a certain amount of time, and then to progress to do the same with the next structure that appealed to her. Therefore, throughout the course of her work, we can begin to see a refinement and development of her writing style, which is paralleled by her use of meter.

### The Early Poems: 1956-1957

In the earliest poems of the main portion of Plath's career, those from 1956, she tends to use large, dense blocks of lines, usually of about six lines per stanza. On a few occasions an entire poem will have no stanza divisions. These poems, mostly in iambic feet with some trisyllabic substitutions, tend to have an average of four to six feet per line, giving them a heavier feel than those that follow them.

*Street Song* is written mostly in iambic trimeter, with some two foot, four foot, and five foot lines which add to the poem's feeling of barely concealed chaos. Lines 18-20 are all two foot lines, of which 19 and 20 have reversed first feet, giving "And that great wound/Squandering red/From the flayed side," a rather choppy and emphatic feel. Line 26 is also constructed in the manner of 19 and 20, along with catalexis in the first weak position, giving it an even stronger emphasis. Line 23 makes use of the expectations of iambic trimeter, by using a four foot line to accentuate "Above pitch of pedestrian ear," and, finally, line 27 also plays on this set of expectations by reversing the first two feet, echoing the words "Every downfall and crash."

*Spinster* is also written in iambic meter with some reversed feet. It has a more intricate syllable structure than *Street Song*. It is full of trisyllabic substitution, it has some strong syllables in weak positions and some catalexis. Plath uses the weak-strong rhythm of iambic meter to emphasize her

strong syllables. She also uses strong syllables in weak positions in contrast to the expected pattern. It is interesting to note that a number of times in this poem, catalexis at the head of a line goes along with disarray and confusion, in lines such as 3-5 " With her latest suitor/ Found herself, of a sudden, intolerably struck,/ By the birds' irregular babel." Contrary to this, catalexis also appears in lines concerning control over chaos, in lines such as 26, " Such a barricade of barb and check." In any case, she is obviously manipulating the iambic weak-strong foot as well as exploring rhythms that oppose or variate it.

The *Disquieting Muses*, written in 1957, is in iambic tetrameter. In lines such as 6-7, the heavily accented words fall in the alternating strong positions. This absolute adherence to alternating stress "With heads like darning-eggs to nod/And nod and nod at foot and head," gives these lines a pounding, almost military march sort of rhythm. It also makes reversed syllables more dramatic. Nearly every time the word "mother" appears in the poem, it begins a line with a reversed syllable and is followed by a grammatical break. It creates a grating sound against the already militant rhythm of the poem. The last two lines of the poem are especially powerful. Line 55, starts with two reversed syllables and is divided in the middle, but then the final line returns to the heavy, regular, alternating stress. It is in these last two lines that the speaker finishes her ironic portrayal of the world given by the mother figure, and declares that, in spite of everything, she will not act in a way that will reveal the sort of world it appears to be to her. This is echoed by the at first choppy and then regulated rhythm of "Mother, mother. But no frown of mine/ will betray the company I keep."

#### The Colossus: 1958-1959

The first published collection of Sylvia Plath's poetry, and the only one published during the author's lifetime, *The Colossus*, is comprised mainly of poems written during 1958 and 1959. It was at this time that Plath began to experiment with and expand on styles and techniques she had previous experience with, and to put in the field work necessary for the development of her later works. This was a relatively productive period, only surpassed by the almost profligate stream of poetry written in the 1962 period.

*Full Fathom Five* is one of Plath's more obvious traditionally formatted poems. It is made up of fifteen stanzas, each of which has first and last lines of three iambs, which rhyme, and middle lines of four iambs. The rhyme scheme is a b a b c b c d c . . . There aren't any real deviations from the pattern, aside from line 21, "The muddy rumors" having only two syllables. This comes nearly in the middle of the poem, directly after "so vapors/Ravel to clearness on the dawn sea", which is distinctly different from the line that follows, and the missing syllable emphasizes this. Catalexis in this poem is

mostly used to accentuate lines which describe the huge or the harsh, such as 5-6 ". . . waves/ Crest and trough. Miles long," and 27 " Ages beat like rains." The fairly straightforward form of this poem makes obvious some of the trademark Plath techniques. It is, as usual, heavy on the strong beats, heavier on strong beats in weak positions and as a result of catalexis, and full of trisyllabic substitution.

Lorelei is in iambic trimeter with 12 three-line stanzas. Lines 3, " Black beneath bland mirror-sheen," and 36, " Stone, stone, ferry me down there," have four foot lines, calling attention to the great depths of the place the poet is describing. There is some trisyllabic substitution, but it doesn't seem to contribute much to the meaning or the rhythm, as in previous poems, so we will cease to mention it henceforth. Catalexis occurs a few times in corroboration with disturbing phrases, as in lines 3, 24, " On the pitched reefs of nightmare," 31, " Of your ice-hearted calling," and 36. It also casts a tone of irony or even a suggestion of something sinister in lines such as 17-18 "[your song] Bears a burden too weighty/ For the whorled ear's listening," in 19-20, " Here, in a well-steered country, / Under a balanced ruler," in 30, "[Worse/Even than your maddening] Song, your silence. At the source," and in 36, " Deep in your flux of silver." This poem is relatively simple, but it provides us with examples of Plath using catalexis to emphasize both disturbing and ironic lines as well as slightly sinister undertones within lines.

The Eye Mote is, for the most part, in iambic tetrameter, arranged in five six-line stanzas. It has an unusual rhyme scheme: abbacc deedff . . . , which gives the last line of the stanza a great deal of strength. The most obvious exceptions to the rhythm are the few lines with more or less than four feet. The first, line 11, "A melding of shapes in a hot rain," is particularly effective because its feet have melted from four to three, and it is the first indication of the eye mote's effect upon the speaker. Lines 12, "Outlandish as double-humped camels or unicorns," and 13, "Grazing at the margins of a bad monochrome," have an excess rather than a lack of feet. Both of these lines describe the bizarre visual effects the eye mote produces, and the extra foot in each case serves to further point out the warped quality of these lines. Catalexis appears in the first stanza with lines 3-4, " Tails streaming against the green/ Backdrop of sycamores. Sun was striking," in the second verse, line 12, "Horses warped on the altering green," in the fourth verse, line 21, " Neither tears nor the easing flush," and 22, " Blind to what will be and what was," and in stanza five, line 29, "Horses fluent in the wind,[A place, a time gone out of mind.]" It is used in conjunction with first the natural flow of the scene, then the severity of the warp caused by the eye mote, and finally to denote the irrevocable change that has taken place within the speaker.

Suicide off Egg Rock is written in iambic tetrameter. It is organized into four stanzas of, respectively, 13, 7, 3, and 1 line(s). This is among the first of Plath's poems to end in a one line stanza

or otherwise unexpected grouping of lines. The last, extrametrical, syllable of line 24, gives the poem a sort of fade out. Plath goes to extremes in using the strength of the weak-strong construction of iambic meter in lines 8-9, "And his blood beating the old tattoo/I am, I am, I am." The suicide's body is no longer a person, it has become a machine to him, something that pulses and beats without his consent, like the words "I am, I am, I am." As the man approaches his destiny, Plath brings in catalexis to show the world slip away from the man's consciousness. This takes place in lines 20-23 "[The words in his book wormed off the pages.] Everything glittered like blank paper./ Everything shrank in the sun's corrosive/ Ray but Egg Rock on the blue wastage." The last, very powerful, line, "The forgetful surf creaming on those ledges," is surrounded on both sides with extrametrical syllables, giving it a distance from the rest of the poem, as the man has distanced himself from the world.

The *Colossus* is in iambic meter, but doesn't appear to follow any particular foot number pattern. This poem represents the new experiments Plath was conducting with her poetry. The *Colossus*, in particular, is a fitting poem to have more freedom of construction, as it is written about a woman trying to reconstruct her father from the remains and memories she retains of him. The first lines, "I shall never get you put together entirely,/ Pieced, glued, and properly jointed," are slightly disjointed. "Thirty years now I have labored/To dredge the silt from your throat./ I am none the wiser," (8-10), says the daughter, and the catalexis emphasizes the missing pieces that she is searching for. "Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails of Lysol/I crawl like an ant in mourning/ Over the weedy acres of your brow," (11-13), she continues, and the excess of syllables in line 11 gives life to a nervous, tiny ant, while the missing weak position in 13 emphasizes again the missing information she wants to find. Again, in lines 24-25, "Nights, I squat in the cornucopia/Of your left ear, out of the wind," says the ant-woman to the *Colossus*, and finally, she resolves the problem for now, "No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel/ On the blank stones of the landing." She knows he is not coming back, and this is made visible by the first position left out of the last line.

The *Stones* is also constructed of iambic feet arranged in slightly shorter lines and stanzas than those of Plath's earlier poems. This poem has a rhyme scheme, *abb caa dcc eff gee hgg*, etc, which remains fairly constant. Plath uses catalexis to emphasize the images of the hospital as a sort of workshop, and also to set apart the lines where the body and the physical world betray the mind's intent. The poem begins with "This is the city where men are mended," which gives the whole of life a mechanical feel; it is merely a physical object which can be repaired with proper tools.

The next two stanzas flash back to the speaker's exiting the world, then "Only the mouth-hole piped out./ Importunate cricket," (11-12), and the mouth gave away the mind's location. The speaker, "Drunk as a foetus," (17) is discovered, and the "jewelmaster" comes to "Open one stone eye." (21)

Following this, catalexis marks the awaking and the repair of the machine-body. " This is the after-hell: I see the light,"(22) says the speaker, then " Water mollifies the flint lip," (25) followed by "[The grafters are cheerful]/ Heating the pincers, hoisting the delicate hammers,"(28) and finally, "[A current agitates the wires]/ Volt upon volt. Catgut stitches my fissures."(30) The next two lines which begin with catalexis return to the original idea of the hospital as a mechanic shop. Again, " This is the city of spare parts," (33) and " Here they can doctor heads, or any limb."(35) The last headless lines describe the betrayal of love, which caused the mind to return and the body to be fixed. " Love is the uniform of my bald nurse./ Love is the bone and sinew of my curse./ The vase, reconstructed, houses/The elusive rose." (39-42), says the speaker, holding Love responsible for the "curse" of a return to life. The last line, typical of Plath, ends in the regular iambic beat, heavy on the second syllable of the foot, paralleling the speaker's resignation to the idea of returning.

The *Mushrooms* is an early example of the shortened line lengths that characterize much of Plath's later work. It is composed of eleven stanzas of three-line iambic pairs. It contains some catalexis, mainly in sync with lines concerning the tiny mushrooms quietly changing everything to their will. Examples include the description of their stealth, "[Overnight,] very/ Whitely, discreetly,/ Very quietly,"(2-3), then the world's unconcern, " Nobody sees us/ Stops us, betrays us,"(7-8) followed by their actions, "[Soft fists insist on]/ Heaving the needles," (11), " Even the paving," (13) " Earless and eyeless,/ Perfectly voiceless,/ Widen the crannies," (15-17). Then it coincides with the small needs of the mushrooms, who " Diet on water," (19) "[asking] Little or nothing." (22). Finally, there is catalexis in the line " Nudgers and shovers," (28), which marks the transition in the poem when the mushrooms declare they will overrun the earth. The *Mushrooms* also makes good use of the iamb structure, especially in line 14, when the poem describes "Our hammers, our rams," and emphasizes the rhythmic pounding and drilling of the little mushrooms. The final line of the poem yet again retains the heavy second beat of its iambs, strengthening these last outrageous lines.

#### The Middle Years: 1960-1961

The years between the poems of the *Colossus* period and those of the *Ariel* period, were not so abundant as the surrounding eras, nevertheless Plath continued to build upon past works and to fine-tune her techniques. She also began to deviate from traditional iambic verse structures, although never giving up the iambs themselves. She wrote short, intensely focused poems like *The Hanging Man* , and longer, more dense ones such as *The Moon and the Yew Tree* , and generally stretched the limits of her meter.

*The Hanging Man* has an unusual form for a Plath poem. It consists of three two-line stanzas of

iambic pentameter. It has a rhyme scheme, ab cb ac, which is further accentuated by the extrametricality which occurs only in the c and b rhymed lines. Also, those lines with the extrametricality rhyme their last two syllables, (i.e. prophet/socket, eyelid/I did), which always begin in a strong position. The poem keeps to the underlying rhythm of its iambs, except for line 2, which is the only line describing what the god did to the speaker. The line "I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet," has an extra foot, which draws attention to the excessive voltage applied by the god, and the way it wiped out the speaker. The last line finishes on a strong note, and also has some nice metrical properties. This line is about equivalence, "If he were I, he would do what I did,"(6), and it is complemented by the division of its metrical structure into two even parts. This relatively short poem is actually very helpful in demonstrating Plath's ability to create and play with metricality in order to add emphasis to her poems.

The Rival describes an Other who is possibly a rival for the moon, or alternatively, for the speaker. The poem is made up of two stanzas of five lines and one stanza of seven lines, which serves to set off the last two lines as a finality almost separate from the rest of the final stanza. The catalexis in the poem is used to point out descriptions of the Rival, such as " Both [you and the moon] are great light borrowers,"(4) " Ticking your fingers on the marble table, looking for cigarettes,/ Spiteful as a woman, but not so nervous,"(8-9) " Your dissatisfactions, on the other hand,/Arrive through the mailslot with loving regularity,/ White and blank, expansive as carbon monoxide,"(13-15) and "[No day is safe from news of you,]/ Walking about in Africa maybe, but thinking of me."(17) There seems to be a slightly sinister tone to the Rival, and these headless lines serve to strengthen their impact.

The Moon and the Yew Tree is, according to A. Alvarez, friend to and literary critic of Plath, one of her major transitional pieces. It marked a change in Plath's writing style and approach to poetry. It is also one of Plath's darkest and most severe works, taking place as it does, entirely at night. It has four stanzas of seven lines each. The lines are formed of five to seven iambs. Catalexis again plays a role in sharpening certain lines, most noticeably the first indication of sound in the poem. Line 12, " Twice on Sunday, the bells startle the sky-/ Eight great tongues affirming the Resurrection," is unusual in that the lines preceding it have been solely visual images, whereas it brings in sound. Having the first syllable of the line in a strong position startles one as the bells would. The following lines keep a fairly regular iambic form, until the speaker starts to imagine the moon interacting with her, " Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes."(21) She continues, " I have fallen a long way. Clouds are flowering/ Blue and mystical over the face of the stars,"(22-23) and "[the saints will be all blue,]/ Floating on their delicate feet over the cold pews."(25) These few lines convey most of the life and movement of the poem, against the black, cold backdrop. The poem goes back to its stiffness after these catalectic lines,

while simultaneously returning to the regular iamb rhythm. The last line ends in complete regularity, seven feet surrounded by two extrametrical syllables, echoing the blackness and silence of the setting.

### The Ariel Poems: 1962

Sylvia Plath's second collection of poems, *Ariel*, published posthumously in 1965, is comprised mostly of poems written in 1962, during what could be called the most fertile period of the author's writing. In this year alone, she wrote nearly sixty poems, as compared to a previous average of thirty poems per year. Thus any discussion of Plath's work ought to go into more detail regarding the poems written at this point. These poems also display a great deal of poetic growth and development, as well as refinement.

*Elm* is one of the poems included in the *Ariel* collection, and, like most of these poems, it is quite different from Plath's earlier work. It has fourteen stanzas of three lines, composed of iambic feet of varying lengths. Plath uses the lengths to evoke the feeling of the lines. The first line, "I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap root:" is one of the longest lines in the poem, and its length seems to represent the bottom, or the deepest level. The third line, "I do not fear it: I have been there," is dramatized by the equal length of its two sections. Line six, "Or the voice of nothing, that was your madness?" makes use of extrametricality to bring the feeling of nothing into itself. Catalexis in the seventh line, "Love is a shadow," and eighth line, "Listen: these are its hooves: it has gone off, like a horse," serves to show the shadow, and the fact that the horse/love has left. Line 12 uses catalexis and extrametricality to sound out "Echoing, echoing," and line 14 uses catalexis for "This is rain now, this big hush." Line 16 is surrounded by extrametrical syllables, separating off "I have suffered the atrocity of sunsets." In line 21, "[A wind of such violence]/Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek," contains extrametrical syllables, setting off the shriek from the rest of the line. The extrametricality in line 24, "Her radiance scathes me. Or perhaps I have caught her," gives the line a choppy rhythm, in comparison to the next line, "I let her go. I let her go," which returns to smoothness. Line 27 uses catalexis to start off on a strong beat, with "How your bad dreams possess and endow me." Then a cry enters the poem, and "Nightly it flaps out/ Looking, with its hooks, for something to love." (29-30) This line is full of extrametricality, like little hooks. Again the bottom is described as "All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity," (33) with a full seven feet, as was the first line of the poem. A sharp division in mid-line shows off the irretrievable qualities of "Are those the faces of love, those pale irretrievables?" (35) The thirteenth stanza diminishes in feet, as "I am incapable of more knowledge." (37) The next to last line brings back the seven foot line, and the bottom that the speaker fears, with "It petrifies the will. These are the isolate, slow faults." (41) This slowness is magnified by the fact that the

sentence continues on to the next line. The sharpness of rigid iambs is played in the last line of the poem, "That kill, that kill, that kill."

Daddy is one of Plath's most well-known poems. In it, the speaker is trying to rid herself of the repression of a towering father who still haunts her. It is comprised of sixteen verses of five lines each. It has a recurring rhyme that shows up in some stanzas more than others. For the most part, the steady beat of the iambs, along with the line rhymes and some internal rhymes, gives the impression of a military drill or marching. The rhymed lines always end on a strong beat, with the exception of line six, "Daddy, I have had to kill you," which ends in extrametricality, echoing its statement that the speaker has had to kill the father, and therefore the "you" is almost parenthetical. In contrast, Daddy, consisting of a strong beat then a weak one, is often used in place of a first iamb or in a place that then requires catalexis and extrametricality, (i.e. lines 6&51). The rhythm is also used in lines 31-2, "An engine, an engine/ Chuffing me off like a Jew," to give the impression of a train. In the last stanza of the poem, the synchrony of the rhythm and the recurring rhyme cause a forceful end to the poem. Line 76 uses a triple rhyme in strong-weak-strong positions to make a sort of echo, "fat black heart," line 77 rhymes the end syllables of "villagers" and "never," both in weak positions, line 78 rhymes "dancing" and "stamping," both with initial strong beats, line 79 rhymes "knew," in a strong position, with the recurrent (you, do, two, etc.) rhyme, and the last line rhymes "Daddy, daddy" with "bastard," all with initial strong positions, and "through" in a strong position, finishes the recurrent rhyme. This poem derives its strength mainly from the rhythm inherent to iambs.

Fever 103 has a feverish quality to it, which, from a technical point of view, relies upon the assonance and alliteration of each sequence of words. The rhythm aids this by assigning to each sound pair the equivalent metrical position and strength. "The tongues of hell/ Are dull, dull as the triple/ Tongues"(2-4) shows the use of strong beats to accent the similar sounds of "dull" and "tongues," and then "triple" and "tongues." The same is true of "gate" and "incapable" in the fifth line, "the sin, the sin./ The tinder cries" (7-8), "the low smokes roll," (11), "Such yellow sullen smokes" (14), "trundle round the globe" (16) "Hiroshima ash," (26) "Eating in./ The sin, the sin," (26-7) "Glowing and coming and going," (42) "I think I may rise-/The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I," (44-5) "pink things mean,"(50) "sel̄ves dissol̄ving," (53), and "pettycoats-/To Paradise." (53-4) The alternating stress of the iambs plus the echoing and repeating of sounds adds greatly to the rather lurid and feverish state of the speaker.

Ariel is another of Plath's well-known pieces. It is incredibly sparse and fast-paced, which has a great deal to do with its short line lengths. The lines, divided into groups of three, except for the very last line, are composed of one to four iambs. The frequent usage of catalexis in beginning lines adds to



the fast pace of the poem, the feeling of being "haul[ed] through air." The background rhythm mimics the horse's hooves hitting the ground, "The furrow/ Splits and passes"(6-7) is split by a line boundary, "Hooks-"(12), with its one syllable acts like a hook, " Shadows"(14) is surrounded by catalexis and extrametricality, like a shadow, "The child's cry/ Melts in the wall" (24-5) actually loses a syllable, melting, "Suicidal"(29) has lost its head, "at one with the drive"(29) is the same length as "Into the red" (30), and the last line, separated, which the poem (and the speaker) crashes into, has its own rhythm. The rhythm in this poem emphasizes its flight.

Lady Lazarus , like Daddy, is partially autobiographical, with metaphoric references to World War II's Nazi death camps, and it has a very heavy rhythm. It contains twenty-eight stanzas of three lines each. It resembles the structure of Ariel , but it is much longer. It also has an unusual rhyme scheme, with about three main rhymes that recur over various portions of the text. The first eleven stanzas have one recurring rhyme (me, enemy, teeth, be) and relatively frequent catalexis, which sometimes coincide, giving a heavy feel to this section, which announces that the speaker has "done it again," and is being put on display. The next eight stanzas, which describe what the speaker has done, are relatively free of catalexis and have a separate recurring rhyme (else, well, hell), dividing them from the first set of verses. The following six stanzas frequently have catalexis at the beginning of lines, and the rhyme scheme varies, using new rhymes, the first recurring rhyme, and then introducing a new recurrent rhyme. This section, directed at the speaker's malicious 'audience', gains a heavy tone from its structure. The last three lines, entirely free of catalexis and dominated by the final recurrent rhyme, are extremely concise, and have strong iambic beats. This section contains the second part of the speaker's experience, and a threat to the "Herr God, Herr Lucifer" (79), that this phoenix will rise. The even, deliberate rhyme of these last stanzas echoes the sureness in the speaker's words.

Thalidomide , written later than most of the Ariel poems, has even tighter, smaller stanzas, twelve composed of two iambic lines, and two composed of one iambic line. There is a nervousness in this poem, a sense of distortion, reflected in its sudden deviations from its meter, that reflects the birth-defect inducing tranquilizer from which the poem takes its name. The first line starts out with an extrametrical syllable, the second has a grammatical division after the first foot, the third line has two strong beats in weak position, and the fifth and sixth lines begin with catalexis. "Has protected"(9) is surrounded by extrametrical syllables, protecting it from following lines. "Me"(10) is strong in a weak position, preventing it from "that shadow"(10). Eerily, "Knuckles at shoulderblades" (12) starts with a reversed foot, and catalexis and reversed feet mutate "the/ faces that/shove into being, dragging/The lopped/Blood caul of absences"(12-16) "All night I carpenter"(17) has a smooth, hammering beat, and "A space for the thing I am given"(18) has a final extrametrical 'space'. The lines "Of indifference!/The

dark fruits revolve and fall./The glass cracks across,"(22-24) are set off-beat by their initial extrametricality. "The Image/Flees"(25-6) is split in half, and the final line, "Fleēs and aborts like dropped mer̄cury," has reversed syllables and ends in extrametricality. All of its irregularities give this poem an edgy, tense feeling.

#### Edge & the Later Ariel Poems: 1963

On February 11 of this year, Plath committed suicide in her London flat, previously rented by Yeats, but not before penning twelve poems during this period of shortly over a month, many of which could arguably be termed the most brilliant of her career. Refined almost to the point of insanity, these poems represent the culmination of this poet's short but vital career. In this period Plath moves even beyond her Ariel poems.

Sheep in Fog is a relatively short poem, especially for Plath. It has five stanzas of three lines, which contain one to five iambs each. "The hills step off into whiteness," (1) is four feet, and the following two lines are divided up into groups of two feet, echoing a stepping off. " People or stars"(2) begins on a strong beat, denoting authority, while "Regard me sadly, I disappoint them,"(3) trails off. "The train leaves a line of breath" (4) receives a slightly longer line, but next comes "O slow/ Horse the color of rust,"(5-6), slow and full of stops. This is followed by the gloomy, plodding " Hooves, dolorous bells-/All morning the/ Morning has been blackening."(7-9) The next stanza is even and stilling, "A flower left out/My bones hold a stillness, the far/Fields melt my heart."(10-12) The division between far and fields creates a sort of melting. It is as if the speaker has resigned himself to the regular iambic rhythm. The final stanza drops into a heaviness, increasing in feet to the end. "They threaten/To let me through to a heaven,/ Starless and fatherless, a dark water."(13-15) Catalexis occurs at the point where the speaker is pondering breaking through, or falling through, and there is a grammatical pause just before he considers what he will fall into.

Contusion is even shorter than Sheep in Fog. It is four verses long, and each verse has three lines. The only place where catalexis occurs in this poem is at the beginning, when, " Color floods to the spot, dull purple."(1) This backs up the idea of the flooding color, which is followed by a normal iamb describing the dullness of the purple. After this the poem, still in iambs, begins to close in on itself, as "The rest of the body is all washed out,/The color of pearl."(2-3) Then the sea comes in and flows around it, growing, "In a pit of rock/The sea sucks obsessively,/One hollow the whole sea's pivot."(4-6) This line (6) is interesting because it is the pivot of the poem, exactly in the middle, and the extrametrical second syllable of "pivot" is almost exactly in the middle of the other four extrametrical

syllables in the poem. It is a hollow in the pivotal place. The next lines are smaller, while "The size of a fly,/The doom mark/Crawls down the wall."(7-9) This crawling down is echoed by the first falling foot of line nine, which is further distinguished by its reversal from the underlying iamb. "The heart shuts," (10) is forboding with its firm final syllable, and the "The sea slides back,/The mirrors are sheeted," (11-12) has a very even rhythm, with the last extrametrical syllable giving the poem a fade out effect.

Edge is the last poem Plath wrote, making it even more disturbing in its finality. "The woman is perfected,"(1) says it all, this poem is over before it's begun. "Her dead/ Body wears the smile of accomplishment," (2-3) has divided her from her body and is missing a syllable in between. "The illusion of a Greek necessity/ Flows in the scrolls of her toga,"(4-5) is merely an image and is full of extra, even extraneous, syllables. "Her bare/Feet seem to be saying:/ We have come so far, it is over,"(6-7) and 'it is over' is separated from the rest of the sentence, while her feet are divided from their bareness. " She has folded"(12) is folded back on itself without its first syllable. This feeling of closing, or stiffening, continues through "[as petals]/ Of a rose close when the garden/ Stiffens and odors bleed,"(14-15) and they bleed from the excess of "From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower."(16) The next verse discards the woman to regard the moon. "The moon has nothing to be sad about,/ Staring from her hood of bone."(17-18) This is the first stanza of the poem that contains a complete sentence and nothing more. The last stanza is very terse and very final, "She is used to this sort of thing./Her blacks crackle and drag."(19-20) After these two lines there can be nothing to say.

Throughout her career as a poet, Sylvia Plath was well aware of the rhythm and meter involved in poetry. Her early work was mostly modeled on poets who preceded her, and their rhythmic and metrical tendencies. After a sort of apprenticeship, Plath began to stretch and experiment with the metrical framework she had become accustomed to, and finally, she used this background to guide her in her own style of writing. In her poems, Plath uses the properties of iambic meter to enhance her work, whether a given verse is at harmony with or at variance to this structure.

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Rhythm in Verse