Papers of Edgar Allan Poe
Poe, Edgar Allan 1809-1849

Generation date: 2019-06-08


UVA Library ID Information:

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though forty or fifty vague pages, solely because of his inability to show how and why it is a grace—by which showing the question would have been settled in an instant.

About the trochee used for an iambus, as we see it in the beginning of the line,

Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air, there is little that need be said. It brings me to the general proposition that, in all rhythms, the prevalent or distinctive feet may be varied at will, and nearly at random, by the occasional introduction of equivalent feet—that is to say, feet the sum of whose syllabic times is equal to the sum of the syllabic times of the distinctive feet. Thus the trochee, whether, is equal, in the sum of the times of its syllables, to the iambus, thou choose, in the sum of the times of its syllables; each foot being, in time, equal to three short syllables. Good versifiers who happen to be, also, good poets, continue to relieve the monotony of a series of feet, by the use of equivalent feet only at rare intervals, and at such points of their subject as seem in accordance with the startling character of the variation. Nothing of this care is seen in the line quoted above—although Pope has some fine instances of the duplicate effect. Where vehemence is to be strongly expressed, I am not sure that we should be wrong in venturing on two consecutive equivalent feet—although I cannot say that I have ever known the adventure made, except in the following passage, which occurs in "Al Aaraaf," a boyish poem, written by myself when a boy. I am referring to the sudden and rapid advent of a star:

Dim was its little disk, and angel eyes
Alone could see the phantom in the skies,
When first the phantom's course was found to be
Headlong hitherward o'er the stony sea.