Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare
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A Guide for Readers and Actors

Peter Groves
To the memory of “these gentle three”:

Roy Groves (1922 – 2007)

John Oliver (1942 – 2006)

Nicholas Sabin (1949 – 2007)
“Peter Groves’ book will come as a revelation to actors and readers of Shakespeare. With a shortage of formal training and a desperation to be ‘natural’, many actors today ignore or even resist the literary conventions and devices embedded in Shakespeare’s plays.

“Dr Groves’ intensive and illuminating study demonstrates how an appreciation of Shakespeare’s use of metre, stress and rhythm, along with many attendant subtleties, will inform actors’ understanding of a text and allow them to soar beyond the bounds of mere ‘naturalism’, to delight the ear as well as the intellect of an audience.”

—John Bell, Bell Shakespeare

“It is beautifully written, rich with meaning, humorous and deeply knowledgeable, with a full feeling for the life of the stage. Groves analyses the way that Shakespeare uses speech to create and reinforce meaning; and in so doing he engages in an alive and alert way with many of the complexities this entails. He really understands that speaking verse provides the key to ‘living’ a part, and I love the colorful economy of his language – it is full of down-to-earth metaphor, which is really engaging and delightful … This is one of the most originally conceived and useful books I’ve read for a long while.”

—Philippa Kelly, California Shakespeare Theatre
“I pray you, mar no more of my verses with reading them ill-favouredly.”

(As You Like It 3.2.261-2)
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Introduction

Hamlet: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc’d it to you, trippingly on the tongue, but if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines.

(Hamlet, 3.2.1-4)

Shakespeare wrote verse for the ear, not the eye, and so it is not fully present in a silent reading: if you are to appreciate it – or even understand it – in a sophisticated way, you have to hear it. Sometimes you will be listening to the intelligent voice of a skilful actor, but when you’re sitting alone with the book, the voice will have to be your own – and if you’re sitting in a library or a crowded railway carriage, you may have to be content with the voice in your head. What you cannot usefully do, however, is skim or speed-read his plays as though they were newspaper articles: as Cicely Berry, voice coach with the Royal Shakespeare Company, puts it, “with Shakespeare … you have to speak the text out loud and feel the movement of the language before you can begin to realise its meaning” (1993, 52). Listen, for example, to the Fairy Queen, enchanted by a love-charm, on being awakened by the raucous braying of Bottom, the ass: “I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again: / Mine ear is much enamour’d of thy note” (MND 3.1.132-3). The prose sense of this is, of course, absurd in the context, but it is only a part of the meaning of what she says: at least as important is the resonant musicality that lifts her speech – and thus her presence – above the merely ludicrous. This musicality is produced not only by a subtly interwoven pattern of sounds (alternating nasals, other voiced continuants, and long vowels) but also by its dignified, stately rhythm (the second of her lines is in metrical terms a ‘golden’ line, a term explained in §2.4.3). But as John Bell has remarked, “when you perform Shakespeare, you are his collaborator”

1 As willingly.
(2011, xvii): whereas the phonetic texture of the line is present to any speaker of English who hears or speaks it, the rhythm is something the speaker or reader must partly produce in co-operation with the verse, and is therefore something that has to be learned.

This book, then, is about the way Shakespeare organises the rhythms of speech in verse, and uses them to create and reinforce meanings in the theatre (and in the mind of the reader); it doesn’t deal with either prose or song, which are different (and complex) topics. The first chapter explores the material of performance – the music of English speech – and the second deals with the normal ways in which that material is patterned in verse; the third discusses breaks and pauses; the fourth and fifth look at the ways in which performance-direction is structured into the verse in metrical gaps and absences; the sixth briefly covers other kinds of spoken verse in the plays; and the seventh shows how to explore in technical detail the possibilities of the verse for performance.

There are, of course, those who feel we’d be better off ignoring the metre: that iambic pentameter is a kind of “metronome” (Harrison 1948, 249) that stifles the actor’s spontaneity, making soliloquies monotonous and dialogue wooden and artificial.2 There’s an element of truth in this if we confine ourselves to the very earliest examples of blank verse drama, from Gorbuduc (1569) to the late 1580s, but the insistent regularity of this ‘drumming decasyllabon’ was artificially produced: it was a deliberate starching strategy to distinguish the new (and self-consciously artistic) form as far as possible from the rough-and-ready doggerel of the old interludes and morality plays that preceded it (see §6.2.7).3 To reform the crude insistence of early pentameter into something

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2 See Groves (2007) for instances of this curious modern hostility to metre, in part the result of “a failure of ear: an inability to hear pentameter in all its modulated complexity” (128).

3 As an illustration of what Robert Greene dismissed as “the swelling bombast of bragging blank verse” and “the spacious volubility of a drumming decasyllabon” (Preface to Menaphon [1589]), consider the opening of Sackville and Norton’s Gorbuduc (1569):

The silent night that brings the quiet pause.
From painefull travailes of the weare Daie
Prolonges my carefull thoughtes and makes me blame
The slowe Aurore that so for love or shame
Doth longe delaye to shewe her blussing face.
And nowe the Daie renewes my griefull plainte.

The heavy-handed rhythmical insistence illustrated here is not due to incompetence: it is artfully produced by poets who wish to ensure that you will not mistake their verse either for prose or for doggerel. Notice, for example, the ‘drumming’ effect of the almost complete coincidence of stresses (bolded) with beats (underlined), and the ‘bombast’ or padding out with vacuous fillers (silent and quiet in line 1, painful and weary in 2) to ensure that line endings coincide with grammatical breaks.
more lifelike and flexible, Shakespeare merely had to cut back on the starch: in themselves, pentameters are so unobtrusive as a metrical form that some people can’t even hear them, and they occur spontaneously and quite frequently in everyday speech; at the same time they are capable of a huge range of rhythmical diversity. As Kristin Linklater puts it,

The iambic pentameter is a pulse; it is the heart-beat of Shakespeare’s poetry. Like your pulse it does not always keep a steady, dull pace; it races with excitement, dances with joy or terror, slows down in contemplation … There is nothing mechanical about the rhythms of great poetry. If they seem mechanical, you have made them so. (1992, 140)

And of course it is always possible to do so through simple inexperience, as Jack Lemmon, normally such a sensitive actor, showed in his stilted verse-speaking as Marcellus in Kenneth Branagh’s 1996 film of Hamlet.

Shakespeare himself has nothing directly to say about speaking the verse, but Hamlet’s advice to the players is generally taken to be as close as we are likely to get to an authorial view. Since it favours subtlety and lifelikeness over strutting and bellowing, people sometimes assume that by ‘mouthing’ Hamlet means a stilted over-emphasis on the metre, the ‘beat’ of the line. In fact mouthing denotes the over-emphatic and megaphone-distorted bellowing of the town-crier, the effect of which is to obscure those differences in the weight of syllables upon which rhythm and metre depend.5 What Hamlet deplores is not the exaggeration of metrical form but the obscuring of it, and what he is

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4 Australian public radio regularly announces the weather in iambic pentameter: “A warm to hot and mainly sunny day”, for example, or “A top today of thirty-four degrees”. I once spent a few weeks collecting such lines as they occurred in conversation and the media, and was surprised to find how frequent they were. The following little poem is made of lines that are all, individually, exactly as heard or overheard: “Horses performing dressage in the paddock; / A sculpture made of bits of wood you’ve found; / That lovely hat you bought in Covent Garden; / I need to know; I want to understand / Science, the arts, religion and ideas. / Who did you say had read The Golden Bowl? / I’ve never farted in a crowded lift: / Ceremony’s the crucible of soul.”

5 See B. L. Joseph (1951, 79–80). Hugh Blair (1783, 2.209) describes what he calls “a theatrical, or mouthing manner” in public speaking, from those who “dwell upon [the syllables], and protract them; they multiply accents on the same word; from a mistaken notion, that it gives gravity and force to their Discourse”. In a play from 1626, the ‘mouthing’ town-crier (p.14) delivers a proclamation in which the disruptive effect of these distortions is represented in the play-text by vertical solidi: “All manner of schollars and students with their Reteneiers and appurtenances that hold or pretend to hold in Capite| any learning, art or science of the grand Lord our soueraigne Apollo [etc.]” (William Hawkins, Apollo Shroving (London: Printed for Robert Mylbourne [1627], pp.16–17).
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asking of the actors is a performance in which the lines are permitted to ‘trip’ or dance to the rhythms he has written into them. Hamlet’s anxiety for the vulnerability of his rhythms (which should reassure those who think of the pentameter as a sort of stultifying metronomic juggernaut) is only for his lines, the “dozen or sixteen” he has inserted in The Murder of Gonzago; Shakespeare, who wrote considerably more, may have felt a similar concern that his labour in shaping the verse be not undone in the theatre.

Actors approaching Shakespeare for the first time are sometimes advised to ignore the metre and go just for the meaning, but this represents a false dichotomy, since metre, as an organiser of speech-rhythm, is itself a guide to meaning. For Clive James, indeed, the “binding energy” of Shakespeare’s blank verse “is not meaning but rhythm. To a large extent the meaning will take care of itself if the rhythm is well attended to, but if the rhythm is broken then no amount of searching emphasis will make up for the loss” (1983, 93). As Janet Suzman has observed, from her long practical experience of acting Shakespeare, “It’s an indulgence to ignore [metrical] structure. Would you ignore the time-signature in music? What it indicates if you do is that you are not listening to what’s been written” (1996, 147) – and Shakespeare, not only a poet but an actor and practical man of the theatre, is worth listening to: ignoring the metre will impoverish any performance. Getting the metre right does not mean cultivating the Voice Beautiful, or fluting your way through the play like a young John Gielgud: on the contrary, it means paying close attention to the ways in which the rhythmical organisation of the text reinforces emotion, directs pause and emphasis, even cues gesture. Because metrical form in the pentameter is not passively present in the text but rather something that the performer must co-operatively re-create in speaking it, pentameter is what John Barton calls “stage-direction in shorthand” (1984, 25), a supple instrument through which Shakespeare communicates valuable cues to performance.

This is why experienced actors come to see his metre not as an obstacle to be surmounted, or as a snare to trip them up, but as something “designed to help” (McKellen 1996, 33), “a life raft” that “will support you and take you on a wild ride” (Bell 2011, 92). One very practical way in which metre helps the actor is that it provides a set of mental pegs to fix the speech in memory: pentameter speeches are much easier to memorise than prose. I can remember great swathes of undistinguished verse-parts I played as a student, but little or nothing of the prose. But metre also has subtler, more generalised effects: the pentameter produces (when properly performed) a flexible dance of speech-rhythms that can communicate to the alert listener a kind of energy and excitement, even
with material that might not in itself be particularly stimulating,\(^6\) and can assist in creating and reinforcing meanings in performance. Unlike cruder kinds of metre, moreover, it has the effect of focussing attention on the texture of speech, which is important because verse is a device of compression and intensity and therefore has a greater density than ordinary speech (which is why one of the most basic pieces of advice one can give about the verse is not to gabble it, in the manner of Lucentio in the BBC *Shrew*).\(^7\) If a character in a naturalistic play says “Oh look, everybody, it’s morning at last: what a relief that’s all over with”, we get information about the time of day and the character’s relief, but not much more. When Horatio says, after a night of supernatural terrors, “But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad, / Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill”, we get so much more in the same number of syllables, including a vivid sense of what the return of daylight *means* for him (and the others) in emotional terms, and it is in part the metre that slows down and focuses our attention on this richness of meaning.

Sometimes, what theatre people mean by “ignore the metre and it will come out right” is that the metre will take care of itself; there’s some truth in this, in that once you’ve absorbed the system of the verse you needn’t consciously think about it all the time, rather as in riding a bike. The snag is that you still need to know how to do it in the first place, or you’re going to keep ending up in the ditch, with the wheels spinning over your head. I don’t, of course, mean to suggest that there is only one way of speaking Shakespeare – there will be a great many ways of uttering even a single verse appropriately, and every generation of actors does it differently – but there are vastly more ways of getting it wrong, the main cause being the assumption that metre is a simple and straightforward matter. In 1967 Trevor Nunn directed *The Taming of the Shrew* for the Royal

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\(^6\) As Coleridge put it, metre “tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprize, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate influence. As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation; they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed.” From Chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria* (Shedd 1853, 3.416-7).

\(^7\) More precisely, a comfortable speed (which will of course vary according to genre, mood and so on) is about three seconds or a little more per line (measured from one line-beginning to the next); the BBC Lucentio in his opening speech takes just under two. See Nagy (2011) for an account of the way in which human experience appears to be ‘chunked’ into roughly three-second units. It’s conceivable, however, that Elizabethan performers were closer to Lucentio in speed, relying on their audience’s church-bred facility in following complex speech: two seconds per line would fit most plays into the “two hours’ traffic of our stage” (*RJ* Prol. 12), if we take that phrase literally (the ‘two’ might just be there to alliterate pleasingly with ‘traffic’).
Shakespeare Company, with the comedian Roy Kinnear as the father, Baptista. Kinnear, a complete novice to Shakespeare, was anxious about getting the blank verse right, and received many reassurances to the effect that it was “all very simple”, and that one just had to go de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM. Consequently, at the initial read-through he delivered his first line with great aplomb: “Gen\textsc{TLE}-men, IM\textsc{por{TUNE} me NO far\textsc{ThER}}!” (TS 1.1.48).\footnote{Recounted by Trevor Nunn on the Southbank Show, London Weekend Television, broadcast 6 December 1979. Kinnear seems to have got the hang of it, since the drama critic Irving Wardle described the entire cast (which included Janet Suzman and Patrick Stewart) as “all-rounders, as skilled in tumbling, dancing and scene-setting as in delivering the lines” (The Times, 06/04/67).}

To speak of an actor “getting it wrong” might sound rather authoritarian, but metre is really no more than a conventional code that allows the poet to communicate intentions about the rhythmical organisation of the speeches he or she has written, rather as punctuation is a code that communicates intentions about a writer’s meaning. We can ignore these codes if we choose, but we risk two things: the disrespect of those who understand the codes and assume that we don’t (there are whole websites devoted to amusing misuses of the apostrophe) and, much more importantly, a loss of richness and precision (the quotation marks in the market sign I once saw that advertised ‘FRESH’ STRAWBERRIES were presumably meant to emphasise the fruit’s freshness, not cast doubt upon it, and the roadside notice DEAF CHILDREN DRIVE CAREFULLY was doubtless intended as an instruction, not as an observation).

A quick and easy way to subvert the code of metre is to overlook the occasional differences in word-stress that characterise Shakespeare’s English (listed in Appendices A and B). I have heard a Prospero go through the whole of The Tempest referring to his dukedom as contemporary Milán rather than Jacobean Míllan, reducing thus to prose every one of his lines in which the word occurs. The problem is compounded when there are two words with variable stressing in a line: I have heard Laertes’ line “The pérfume and supplíance of a minute” (Ham. 1.3.9) both as “The perfúme and supplíance of a minute” and “The pérfume and súppliance of a minute”. To some these might seem trivial lapses, and there will always be people in the audience who won’t notice, but to those who do the effect is a little like that of a soprano hitting a wrong note: at the very least it is distracting, and subtly undermines one’s faith in the actor’s skill. Many would endorse the view of Shakespearean actors like Janet Suzman (“Mis-scansions put my teeth on edge” [1996, 147]) and Sheila Hancock (“it’s like an electric shock. It jars and feels awful” [Barton 1984, 46]).
Nevertheless, displacing stress in this way only disrupts the metre: it doesn’t usually affect the meaning. The placement of accent is a more serious matter because accent is the system that distributes emphasis in an utterance: one sentence can acquire different contextual implications through the placement of accent (eg “Bill reads books” [Ted prefers fishing], “Bill reads books” [he doesn’t just skim them], “Bill reads books” [not magazines]). There is a rough-and-ready rule of thumb here: accent on even-numbered syllables will tend to preserve the metre, and thus Shakespeare’s rhythmical intentions, whereas accent on odd-numbered syllables (apart from the first) will tend to derail it if the syllables on either side are weak, as when Viola in the BBC Twelfth Night responds to the Captain’s “This is Illyria, lady” with the despairing “And what should I do in Illyria?” In itself this is a perfectly legitimate prose accentuation of the line; the metre, however, guides the actor towards a melancholy double contrast that Shakespeare must have intended: “And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elygium.” (TN 1.2.3–4). Similarly, a Tamora who (as in the BBC Titus) tells her new husband, the emperor, “I will not be denied; sweetheart, look back” (Tit. 1.1.478) has perhaps not fully considered the way in which the metre points a reading that suggests not mere petulance but a steely will (more appropriate to the vengeful queen of the Goths): “I will not be denied”. Again, Horatio in Tony Richardson’s 1969 film of Hamlet enquires of the apparition, “What art thou that usurp’st this time of night?” (1.1.46), as though he were constantly bumping into ghosts around the castle (“Not another one!”); if we give the metre a chance, however, we find a reading that suggests the astonishment – and the epistemological horror – of the card-carrying rationalist confronted by evidence of the supernatural (“What art thou, that usurp’st this time of night?”). Of course, all performance is interpretation, and interpretations are not in themselves either right or wrong, but they can vary, as these examples illustrate, in contextual appropriateness, interesting complexity, and so on. My point is simply that if we trust Shakespeare as an artist, it is always worth at least exploring the performance suggested by the metre, because that is most likely to embody his rhythmical intentions. John Bell has remarked of what he calls “subtleties of phrasing, pitch and cadence”:

I watch opera singers working on a score and note the precision they bring to bear. Actors could do with more of that, as long as we regard it as illumination and not as a rigid formula which has to be lifelessly and technically regurgitated. Just like the opera singer we have to fill that form with spontaneous liveliness. (2011, 90).
In order to explore Shakespeare's metrical suggestions we need to be able to hear and utter the verse-form, but as any teacher of English or patron of amateur theatre can attest, not everybody can—not even, odd as it may seem, every editor of Shakespeare. Yet to judge from the many Companions and Guides currently available, it's just about the one thing modern readers don't need help with: a recent one (Armstrong and Atkin, 1998) has a whole chapter on language but doesn't mention metre once. Even where it is dealt with, it is dismissed rather briskly as something simple or even self-evident, like the rhythm of nursery rhymes or protest chants. The reason for this paradox is that those who have acquired the skill have usually done so osmotically, through prolonged exposure to the verse, rather in the way infants acquire their native tongue, and not by learning the rules from a book; for this reason they tend to find iambic pentameter simple and natural. This is normal with linguistic systems like metre, as in the case of the modern Persian poet “who could not scan even the simplest verses correctly, though he could recite them rhythmically enough”, but whose lines, on examination, did not commit “even a single transgression against the rules which he did not know, but had assimilated simply by reading and listening” (Thiessen 1988, 6). It is probable that changes in education and in leisure habits over the last fifty years or so have lessened the degree of relevant ‘reading and listening’ that goes on. Peter Hall points out that “In the past it was hardly necessary to train actors to speak verse. They had—all of them—been marinated in so much Shakespeare during their early years in regional theatres or on classical tours that the rhythm came naturally to them. … Young actors are now exposed to little Shakespeare” (2003, 11–12).

This book, then, is for those looking for some assistance in exploring and performing the complex rhythms of Shakespeare’s dramatic language: it is not only for actors but for all readers of Shakespeare, because all engaged reading is necessarily performance, if only for an audience of one. It aims to complement and extend, not to replace, the various books already available on the subject of speaking Shakespeare, which typically deal with matters such as voice-production and projection. Such books tend to be written by theatre professionals—actors, directors, and voice-coaches—who do not always have the kind of linguistic understanding about how rhythmical form is embodied in language that would enable them to turn their fine insights into usable suggestions. In consequence their advice on such matters, when

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9 See Groves (2007) for a hair-raising account of the metre-deafness of some recent editors of the plays.
reduced to cold print, tends to turn into vague and unhelpful gestures or cloudy metaphors. If you were studying in person with Patsy Rodenburg I have no doubt she could make you understand clearly what she means by the general injunction to “start the beat dëđûm into the lines. Allow the dûm to pull you up and out. Don’t pull it into you” (2002, 86); a solitary reader faced with this kind of extravagance, however, is likely to respond only with bafflement.

To take a concrete example: there are three quite different markers of syllabic prominence in English: accent, stress and beat (explained in Chapter 1). In most written discussions of metre, however, these three are unhelpfully lumped together as one feature (usually labelled either ‘stress’ or ‘accent’). Imagine a music teacher who could only speak of the voice going ‘up’ or ‘down’, without being able to specify whether the topic was pitch, loudness or tempo: this is roughly analogous to the position of someone describing pentameter with just one catch-all prosodic category. One director, for example, suggests various ways of performing one of Juliet’s verses (RJ 2.2.85), including one he transcribes as ‘Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face’, and asks “Does this final version of the stresses make sense? Can that final ‘on’ take a stress?” (Donnellan 2005, 247). The question is left for the reader, but the reader has not been equipped to give a useful answer. If by ‘stress’ here is meant either stress or contextually motivated accent, the answer is clearly ‘no’: ‘on’ is inherently unstressed, and accent on it would imply some bizarre contrast with an unspoken alternative (‘in my face’, perhaps). If, on the other hand, it’s a question of beats, then the answer is that it not only can take one, but that it must if the line is to be acceptable to the discerning listener as a pentameter. If these distinctions are not made, there is no way of explaining how the actor might attempt to do this – that is, to put a beat on ‘on’ in this line without accenting it. This occasional subtle massaging of speech-patterns towards the forms of the metre, known as ‘supplementation’, is an essential skill for the actor: overdo it and you turn Shakespeare’s verse into nursery rhyme; ignore it and you turn it into prose. All metred verse in English requires supplementation in some degree; one reason iambic pentameter is so often described as ‘naturalistic’ and close to everyday speech is that there the supplementation is at its subtlest and most subliminal.

Finally, a word about Shakespeare’s text. It’s natural to assume that (give or take a few old spellings) his plays appear on the page in front of us more or less as he meant them to, but unfortunately this is not necessarily the case. Shakespeare, unlike his contemporary Jonson, did not oversee the printing
of his plays,\textsuperscript{10} many of which were initially published in two or even three competing versions. Whatever he originally wrote may in any case have been modified before it got into print by different agents at various stages: through feedback from performance; through later revision, either by Shakespeare or a colleague; through ‘correction’ – and negligence – in transcription or in type-setting, and so on. Elizabethan play-texts were seen not as revered works of art created by solitary geniuses but as working documents, rather like modern film-scripts, produced through a kind of serial collaboration among playwrights, actors, scribes and type-setters; to complicate the matter they have been subsequently put (many times) through the mill of editing, with different editors holding quite divergent views on how to attempt to undo this mayhem (or even, more recently, whether one should – or can – undo it). For a fuller discussion of this process see Stern (2004).

The practical upshot of all this is that there is no such thing as ‘the’ text of any Shakespeare play, and so, for any given passage, what appears in your edition of the play (including its precise line-numbers) may not exactly correspond with what I have reproduced here. This is particularly likely with short pentameters (pentameters with fewer than ten syllables – see chapters 4 and 5), since many editors from the Second Folio (1632) onwards, taking such verses for mistakes of one sort or another, have attempted to ‘correct’ them by re-arranging the lineation of the verse or even changing or adding words arbitrarily (the Oxford Complete Works of 1986 is particularly high-handed in this latter regard). The text I have used here is for the most part that of the widely used Riverside Shakespeare (Blakemore Evans, Tobin, et al., 1997); line-numbers refer where possible to this edition. On the few occasions where the Riverside seems to me to be in error, as in Macbeth 2.1.1-3, I indicate a return to the lineation of the First Folio of 1623 with the prefix \textit{F1} before the line-number (this prefix may also mean that I have retained some of F1’s punctuation of a given verse).

Nevertheless, it is not possible to treat F1 as an unquestioned authority, because there are many places in which an editor does genuinely need to correct it: just after the needlessly corrected passage Macbeth 2.1.1-3, for example, is one that needs correction: 2.1.5-7. Lineation, in particular, is a feature that its type-setters or ‘compositors’ were notoriously disrespectful of, setting prose as though it were verse or verse as prose or \textit{vers libre} in order to stretch

\textsuperscript{10} Though this shouldn’t be taken to mean that he didn’t care what happened to his writing: his more prestigious narrative poems, for example, were carefully published. For an interesting discussion of this question see Erne (2003).
or compress the text they were setting into its allotted space on the page. Macbeth’s harangue to the murderers (Mac. 3.1.74-90) and the Nurse’s reminiscences of weaning Juliet (RJ 1.3.16-62), both examples of vigorous blank verse and both usually so printed since the first edited texts, appear in F1 as randomly lineated free verse and as prose respectively.¹¹ One of the most puzzling theatrical fads of recent years has been the use of reprints of F1, such as Neil Freeman’s Applause series, in the misguided belief that its erratic punctuation and disrupted lineation derive directly from Shakespeare, providing a form of privileged insight into his dramaturgical intentions. As we shall see, Shakespeare does indeed encode performance cues in his verse, but he does so by using the code of the metre, not by abandoning it.

A Note on Jargon

Unfamiliar concepts, unfortunately, sometimes require unfamiliar language. I have done my best in this book to minimise the amount of jargon used, and I have tried to find transparent non-technical terms in place of technical ones where possible: thus I refer to the process that turns (say) three-syllabled dang’rous into two syllabled dang’rous as ‘contraction’ rather than as ‘syncope’ (the technical term). Words that have been bolded (but which are not part of an example) are terms that are defined in the Glossary (at the end). Terms I use that have no counterpart in traditional metrics are marked with an asterisk in the Glossary. Occasionally I mention technical terms that I don’t intend to use much, so that readers can recognise them where they need to in other texts, or just satisfy their curiosity, but when I do so I enclose them in braces {} and preface them with the phrase ‘technical term’.

¹¹ As if to illustrate my contention that even some scholars have lost the ability to perceive iambic pentameter, the RSC edition by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (London: Macmillan, 2007) prints both as prose.
1. Prosody – The Music of Speech

Prologue: … We do not come, as minding to content you,  
Our true intent is. All for your delight  
We are not here. That you should here repent you,  
The actors are at hand …

Theseus: This fellow doth not stand upon points.

Lysander: He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt; he knows not the stop.

A good moral, my lord: it is not enough to speak, but to speak true.

(A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 5.1.113–21)

When you listen to speech – preferably in a language you don’t know, so that your attention isn’t distracted by meaning – you can hear that the voice is a kind of musical instrument, going high and low, loud and soft, fast and slow, as required. These musical modulations convey meaning: when Joan of Arc, for example, tells her suitor ► “I must not yield to any rites of love” (1H6 1.2.113),1 a descent in pitch at the end of the line expresses a categorical rejection of him, but a rise expresses a conditional acceptance (i.e. “You’re not wooing me in the right way”). Similarly, when Lady Macbeth asks her husband when King Duncan is to leave their castle, he responds “Tomorrow, as he purposes.” A fall in pitch at the end indicates an innocent informative reply, but a rise at the end flirts with a guilty desire (“that’s what he intends, but I may have other plans”). More subtly, the voice can convey boredom, suspicion, indignation and so on just through tempo and pitch-change.

This music of speech is called ‘prosody’, and since metre is a systematic organisation of prosodic form we need to begin our exploration with a

1 The symbol ► means that the associated example is illustrated by a sound-file, available via the book’s webpage: www.publishing.monash.edu/books/rms-9781921867811.html
discussion of it. Because our culture sees written language as primary and permanent, and speech as derived and secondary, we tend to think (if at all) of prosody – largely invisible in the written language, as in the case of the examples quoted above – as something unimportant, evanescent, adventitious. But consider the case of Derek Bentley, a London teenager who was hanged in 1953 for having supposedly incited his armed accomplice in burglary – a boy too young to be executed – to shoot dead a policeman while resisting arrest. The words on which Bentley was hanged were “Let him have it, Chris”, and the prosecution successfully argued that his meaning was “Shoot him”. But there is room for reasonable doubt (his conviction was finally set aside in 1998) that what Bentley (already detained by a policeman) meant by “Let him have it” was “Let him have the gun”, and a native speaker of English who had heard him would have been in little doubt about which of the two was meant. All the jury had to go on, however, was the bare written record, bleached and denuded of rhythm and pitch-patterns (and re-uttered in the courtroom, presumably in that bland de-natured style in which oral evidence is normally cited). It is this (not unimportant) signifying music of speech that we call prosody, and it is one of the most important tools available to an actor (Dame Edith Evans is partly remembered for the prosody of her magisterially incredulous “A handbag?” from the 1952 film of *The Importance of Being Earnest*).

What distinguishes a verse play from a prose play like *Earnest* is that the prosody of the verse play is governed not just by the rules of natural language but by a kind of partial prosodic score: if the actor’s voice is the instrument through which he or she interprets that score, pentameter is the musical notation that enables that interpretation. In order to relate the one to the other – the complex potential of performance to the prescriptions and constraints of Shakespeare’s metre – we are going to have to understand something of the music of English speech. The good news is that we don’t need to know everything about it, because only a small part of it is relevant to the metre. In essence, metre in English is about the placement of beats, and in order to understand this we need to look at two other kinds of prosodic prominence: stress and contextually motivated accent. Before we do this, however, we need to take a look at the concept of the syllable, the thing that carries stress and accent.
§1.1: Syllables

§1.1.1: Schwa and Half-syllables

Everyone knows that a syllable is a peak of energy in a word, usually associated with a vowel: there is one in *mad*, for example, two in *ma+dde+n*, three in *ma+dde+n*ing, four in *Ma+da+gas+car*, five in *ma+de+ri+sa+tion*, and so on. Knowing the number of syllables in a word is important because syllable-counting is normative in a sophisticated metre like pentameter: the great majority of Shakespeare’s pentameters have ten syllables. But counting syllables is not always as simple as it might seem: is it really *ma+dde+n*ing, for example, or just *madd+n*ing? Does the second word of Juliet’s verse mentioned in the Introduction (“Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face”) have one syllable, or two? Some texts print ‘know’st’ and others ‘knowest’, and the very earliest texts are not in agreement. And yet, whereas in arithmetic the difference between one and two may be absolute, and while the written distinction between ‘know’st’ and ‘knowest’ may seem unequivocal, in prosody it may be a little less clear-cut, because our sense of how many syllables there are in a word does not depend purely upon its sounds. Take, for example, the pairs *lightening* and *lightning*, or *coddling* and *codling*: in normal rapid colloquial speech they would be pronounced identically, and yet we would still probably perceive an extra syllable in the first of each pair simply because we understand the underlying structure of the word (eg *lighten* or *coddle* plus -ing).

At the heart of most syllables is a vowel (or occasionally a voiced continuant\(^2\) such as /l/, /n/ or /m/, as in the second syllable of *kettle* or *button*), and there are twenty or so different vowels and diphthongs (collectively, ‘vocoids’) in English, which our alphabet (an ill-fitting hand-me-down) tries to represent with the half-dozen letters appropriate for its source, Latin. In my dialect (‘Educated Southern British’) the short vocoids are those of \(\text{►}^2_{2}\) *bit, bet, bat, but, put, pot*, and *butter*, and the long vocoids are those of *beat, bait, Bar+nt, baut, bite, boot, boat, Bert, bought, beer, bear, boor, byre* and *bower*). It is very likely that the actual sounds that you make in uttering these words will differ noticeably from mine, and it is certain that Shakespeare’s did, but these qualitative differences in pronunciation do not (on the whole) disturb the system of distinctions among the vocoids, or their relative prominence, and are not therefore relevant to the metre.\(^3\) Oddly enough,

\(^2\) A ‘continuant’ is a speech-sound that can be prolonged indefinitely (unlike ‘p’ or ‘t’); it is voiced if accompanied by vocal cord vibration, like ‘z’ or ‘v’ (but not ‘s’ or ‘f’).

\(^3\) There are of course minor systemic differences to be found among the dialects of English: many Americans do not distinguish the vowels of *cot* and *caught*, for example, or *merry* and...
the most frequent vocoid in English speech, found in most polysyllables and many of the commonest monosyllables, has no specific representation at all: this is the indistinct grunt-like unstressed central vowel called schwa (phonetically [ə]). \( ^{3} \) This vowel is the commonest in normal colloquial and conversational usage, and arises from the phonetic reduction of vowels in many unstressed syllables (compare phonograph with photograpy). This reduction of vocoids to schwa is a standard feature of normal colloquial English, from the highly educated Cambridge or “Hahvahd” variety to the working-class speech of Liverpool, Detroit or Parramatta. \(^{4} \)

Incidentally, because our mental image of English is based upon the written language, in which schwa is not even registered, people are often surprised and even dismayed to discover how prevalent it is in ordinary speech. Sometimes actors (even good actors) who are new to Shakespeare’s verse take it to be a kind of ceremonial language requiring an overly precise enunciation, and so make a point of replacing schwas in little words like prepositions and conjunctions with a full vowel: \( ^{4} \) “Too bee orr nott too bee”. The problem with this is not just that it sounds stilted and unnatural in itself: since full vowels are a cue to stress it blurs to some extent our perception of the metre (it is a form of ‘mouthing’, as denounced by Hamlet [Ham. 3.2.1-4]), and since full vowels take longer to utter than schwa, another effect is subtly but systematically to disrupt the timing of the utterance, producing a distractingly disjointed and unnatural performance of the verse.

§1.1.2: Schwa and Elasticity

As a syllable, schwa is both light and unstable; if for convenience we represent the vocoid (properly, a diphthong) of know by <ō>, the difference between ‘know’st’ and ‘knowest’ is in phonetic terms an analogue one, not a digital one: it is not the unequivocal distinction <nōst> vs.<nō-est>, but rather both pronunciations are versions of <nōst>, a one-and-a-half syllabled word that can slide either way on the scale, depending on the lightness with which we enunciate the schwa. It follows that any word with a vocoid followed immediately by a schwa (like power, here, fire, and so on) automatically has a kind of syllabic instability or double potential: a contracted form (pow’r) natural to rapid colloquial speech and an expanded form (pow-er) that may

\[ ^{4} \text{ marry, and someone from Yorkshire would conflate the vowels of but and put, but might have two distinct hate-vowels, distinguishing rain from reign.} \]

\[ ^{4} \text{ Schwa is also a very common vocoid in French (“J’a n’a la fais pas dire!”) and German (“Heut’ haban die jungə Heldan sehr schwer gəarbeitə.”), and again is not represented in either orthography.} \]
occur in more deliberate or formal speech. We may think of the half-syllable here as a value that can be either rounded up to a full syllable in scansion (thus expanding the ‘underlying’ word by half a syllable) or rounded down to a non-syllable (thus contracting the word by half a syllable). The vowel that is absent (or not fully present) in the contracted form is a ‘half-vowel’, and the process that truncates expanded forms into contracted forms by deleting half-vowels may be called ‘contraction’ [technical term: ‘syncopation’]. The obverse of this, pronouncing the half-vowel and thus producing the expanded form of a word, may be called ‘expansion’. Where a word includes a half-vowel, and thus both an expanded and a contracted form, we may describe it as ‘elastic’. Note that every elastic word has an expanded and a contracted form, even where the expansion or contraction is fairly rare: we may think of elastic words as having in theory \( N + \frac{1}{2} \) syllables, which in performance must be either contracted to \( N \) or expanded to \( N + 1 \).\(^5\)

§1.1.3: Counting Syllables

Juliet’s line, however, is not prose but verse, and this makes all the difference to the process of counting: this is because in metred verse the writer conforms to a particular code which he or she expects the reader to understand. Since we can assume Juliet’s line is meant to be a pentameter (because it occurs in a work written in pentameters and conforms to all the requirements of pentameter), and since the last of its possible eleven syllables (face) is stronger than the one that precedes it and cannot therefore be a tail or ‘feminine ending’, the half-vowel in ‘knowest’ — the only one available — must be dropped in order to squeeze the line into the requisite ten syllable-positions. We can be certain, that is, that ‘knowest’ is meant to count metrically as a monosyllable in Juliet’s line, whereas by the same logic ‘lowest’ in the second of these lines is meant to count as two syllables:

\[
\text{(1)} \quad \text{Thou, know}^*\text{st, the, mask, of, night, is, on, my, face}^\text{10} \\
\text{In, to, the, cha, nnel, till, the, low, est, stream}^\text{10} 
\]

(RJ 2.2.85) (JC 1.1.64)

Note that I have put the <e> of ‘knowest’ in superscript rather than replacing it with an apostrophe in the normal fashion (‘know’st’). This is to signify that the schw\(\text{a}\) it represents need not be completely eliminated (‘know’st’ doesn’t

\(^5\) Of course, there may be more than one half-vowel, as in contemporary peremptory, which can be said as any of:► tetrasyllabic \text{parémentry}, trisyllabic \text{prémentry} or \text{parémentry}, or disyllabic \text{prementry}. Shakespeare, however, said \text{prementory}.
have to rhyme exactly with ‘toast’), though it should be touched very lightly: it is enough that the expanded forms get a more pronounced schwa than the contracted ones. The apostrophe should be used where the vowel is completely absent, as in ‘dated and stamp’d’. Similarly:

(2) ►
And keep not back your powers in da-lli-ance.  
And knit our pow-ers to the arm of peace.  
I fear my bro-ther Mor-ti-mer doth stir  
You speak it out of fe-är and cold heart.  
As fi-re drives out fire, so pi-ty pi-ty –  
Hear, Na-ture, he-är; de-är go-ddess, hear!

The ripple in the rhythm of a line produced by a contracted form such as powers or danger-ous is one of the factors that gives pentameter its liveliness and lifeliness.

The important point to remember about contracted and expanded forms is that the poet can choose between them, and while the choice is indicated by the metre it may be motivated by other considerations than metrical convenience: in the last line of example (2), for example, the expanded forms heär and deär (two syllables each) are used for emphasis, and to impart a kind of liturgical solemnity to the imprecation.

§1.1.4: Kinds of Contraction

Contraction comes in three basic varieties: the first [technical term: ‘syncope’ (sing-ko-pee)] drops a schwa or a weak /ĭ/ before a voiced continuant such as /r/, /l/ /n/ and /m/: dif-ferent, per-ĭlous, coun-ĭnance, pusillan-ĭmous, moment-ĭry (the superscript, we recall, reflects the vowel’s ghostly persistence in the rhythm of the utterance). To illustrate syncope:

(3)  
But either it was di-ffe-rent in blood –  
The di-ff-ĭrent plague of each calamity.  
My grisly coun-te-nance made others fly,  
In gait and coun-ĭnance surely like a father.  
O mo-men-ta-ry grace of mortal men,  
The fit is mo-men-ĭry, upon a thought
In verse-texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, syncope is often (but not reliably) indicated in printed texts by an apostrophe: *diff’rent, ev’ning, par’lous* (from *perilous*). Occasionally (and more frequently in the later plays) Shakespeare will use ‘extended’ syncope – that is, he will treat a *schwa* in a polysyllable as though it were a half-vowel even when it cannot in fact be eliminated in pronunciation (here the extra vowel has rather more than a ghostly presence, and in reading we should make no attempt to eliminate it, though we should utter the word in which it occurs quite rapidly). I will indicate extended syncope with a larger vowel-symbol:

(4)

| His maj*esty* seldom fears. I “m Cressid’s uncle, | *(AW 2.1.97)* |
| ’Tis done already, ānd the mess*enger* gone. | *(AC 3.6.31)* |
| Like to a vag*bond* flag upon the stream | *(AC 1.4.45)* |
| Āll broken impl*ements* of a ruin’d house. | *(Tim. 4.2.16)* |

The /ɪ/ between a stressed syllable and a following *schwa*, as in *envious, deviant, Romeo* is usually contracted in rapid speech into the /ʏ/ sound of *yes: en’vous* (*en-ʊvʊs*), *dev’ant* (*dɛv-yɑnt*). *Rom’o* (*Rom-yo*) {technical term: ‘syneresis’, rhyming with *thesis*}, and unlike syncope it is not traditionally registered in the orthography:

(5)

| Be not her maid, since she is en-*vi-ous*. | *(RJ 2.2.7)* |

**Juliet:** Can heaven be so *en-vi-ous*?

**Nurse:** *Ro-m*’o can,

Though heaven cannot. *O Ro-m*’o, *Ro-me-o*! *(RJ 3.2.40–1)*

Finally, as we have seen, a *schwa* or a /ɪ/ is always a half-vowel when adjacent to a full vowel: *know*’st, *th*’ entire, *you “nd me* {technical term: ‘synalépha’, rhyming with ‘reefer’}. Synalepha may take place between successive stressed and unstressed vowels, or between a word-final vowel and a following word-initial one provided no major syntactic boundary intervenes:

(6)

| *Be*’ng red, she loves him best; and *be-ing* white, | *(VA 77)* |
| Is all too heavy *to admit* much talk | *(2H4 5.2.24)* |
| *T*’admit no traffic ānd our adverse towns: | *(CE 1.1.15)* |
And how the English have the suburbs won. (1H6 1.4.2)

How th’English, in the suburbs close intrench’d, (1H6 1.4.9)

No excuse current but to hang thyself, (R3 1.2.84)

There was a yielding – this admits no’excuse. (Cor. 5.6.69)

Historically a /v/ between a stressed vowel and a schwa is always likely to disappear, exposing the schwa to synaloepha, as in o’er, ne’er and e’en. In the case of these conventionally indicated contractions the /v/ should disappear completely in performance; pronouncing heaven and given as hen and gin, however, would sound odd and threaten comprehension (“the cannons to the hens”), and so the best strategy is to pronounce the /və/ quickly and lightly:

(7)

New lighted on a hea-ven-kissing hill, (Ham. 3.4.59)

The cannons to the hea-ven-s, the hea-ven-s to earth, (Ham. 5.2.277)

Would she had ne-ver giv’en you leave to come! (AC 1.3.21)

Ne’er brake into extremity of rage. (CE 5.1.48)

And ha-ving that do choke their service up (AYL 2.3.61)

Not ha’ng the pow’r to do the good it would, (Cor. 3.1.160)

One final kind of contraction is the optional loss of initial (or sometimes final) schwa in a small number of words, such as ’gainst from against or squire from esquire [technical term: ‘aphesis’, rhyming with thesis]. The most common kind of aphesis affects grammar words, such as auxiliary verbs (eg I am, we are, he is, you will be ⇒ I’m, we’re, he’s, you’ll be). This will frequently be registered by an apostrophe, even in modern editions, but not always: as David Crystal has pointed out, “In some cases, it is only the written form that is distinctive: in modern English we do not usually write y’are for ‘you are’ or o’doors for ‘of doors’, but the colloquial pronunciation of you are going or out of doors would hardly differ between then and now” (2002, 146). For this reason, we may assume such contractions where they are metrically necessary, as in the case of I am ⇒ I’m in the first line of #4 below.

Aphesis in Shakespeare’s English (grammatical words):

it ⇒ ’t (eg it is well, pox on it ⇒ ’tis well, pox on’it)

the ⇒ th’ (eg i’th’night [two syllables])

us ⇒ ’s (eg take upon’s the mystery of things)

You, ye ⇒ y’ (eg y’are i’th’right)
In some varieties of British English, *the* is pronounced *thee* before a vowel, making it difficult to drop (though available for syneresis before a vowel), but in Elizabethan (as in many forms of contemporary) English, *the* seems to have been given a schwa in all positions, making contractions such as *th’entrance* or *th’abuse* perfectly natural.\(^6\)

#### §1.1.5: Restorables (expanded forms peculiar to Shakespeare’s English)

Shakespeare’s English has a number of expanded forms that have since disappeared because the contracted forms have become permanent: syncope has become obligatory for us in words like *Hen’ry, Humph’rey, entr’ance, hand’ling* and *wrest’ler*, for example, and syneresis in words like *not’ion, occas’ion, opin’ion, oc’an* and *Christ’an*, so that for Shakespeare each of these words has an optionally expanded form that sounds unnatural – or at any rate archaic – in modern English:

\[8\]  
> Remember, lords, your oaths to *Hen-ry* sworn:  
> Is Cade the son of *He-na-ry* the Fifth  
> I never saw but *Hum-phy* Duke of Gloster  
> Excepting none but good Duke *Hum-pho-rey*;  
> The stony *en-trance* of this sépulchre?  
> That croaks the fatal *en-tō-rance* of Duncan  
> As nimble *jugg-lers* that deceive the eye  
> O me! you *ju-ggśl-e-r*, you cankerblossom,  
> Will all great Neptune’s *o-cean* wash this blood  
> The beachy girdle of the *o-cē-an*  
> If only to go warm were *gor-gē-ous* [*sumptously dressed*],  
> Why, nature needs not what thou, *gor-geous*, wear’st

The expanded forms may (where necessary) be written *Henëry, entërance, handëling, notïon, occasïon*: “After the prompter, for our entërance” (*RJ* 1.4.8), “The parts and graces of the wrestëler” (*AYL* 2.2.13).

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\(^6\) Evidence for this comes from Elizabethan attempts at phonetic inscription, which give forms such as *ð’abius* for *th’abuse*, and *tu ð’spesiaul* for *to th’special* (see Cercignani 1981, 19). I recently heard an Australian radio announcer naively complaining of references to the ‘Lynpic Games.’
In contemporary English, the *schwa* in the verb ending <-ed> is always dropped where possible (that is, unless it is preceded by <t> or <d>: *banned* is one syllable, but *batted* must be two). This vowel may be restored in Shakespeare’s English; but with a *schwa*, not a full vowel (*banished* should not rhyme perfectly with *dead*, for example, even where the rhyme-scheme seems to require it). Verbs with the endings <-est> and <-eth> may also be expanded or contracted as required by the metre:

(9)

Hence ‘*ba-ni-shëd*’ is *ba-nish’d* from the world,  
By their *o-press’d* and fear-*sur-pri-sëd* eyes  
Curse, miscreant, when thou *co-mest* to the stake  
Thou *com’st* in such a questionable shape

(RJ 3.3.19)  
(Ham. 1.2.203)  
(1H6 5.3.44)  
(Ham. 1.4.43)

The two traditional editorial ways of signalling the metrical status of elastic verb-forms are as follows: “Hence *banished* is *banish’d* from the world” and “Hence *banishèd* is *banished* from the world” (the Arden 3 editions for some reason fail to indicate this distinction in the text, making them less useful for readers and actors).

These ‘dead’ half-vowels have a different effect on our experience of the verse from those that still obtain in modern English, since the latter always have a phantasmal presence for us (due to our knowledge of the language) even when not fully pronounced. For this reason, those of Shakespeare’s half-vowels that are never pronounced in modern English may be distinguished as ‘restorables’. Restorables, unlike half-vowels, are entirely absent to modern ears (and minds) when dropped and thus need only be indicated when they function in the metre: “I hate him for he is a Christïan” (*MV* 1.3.42). This is, of course, a distinction for us rather than for Shakespeare, to whom they were simply half-vowels, but it is a meaningful distinction nonetheless.

§1.1.6: Transitions between Syllables

Obstruents are consonants that obstruct airflow (/p t k b d g f th [as in *thin*] s sh v dh [as in *the*] z zh [as in *rouge*] ch j [as in *judge*]/). An obstruent cluster is a sequence of obstruents occurring within or between words. We cannot, of course, rely on spelling here: <sk> is a cluster in *six* but not in *xylophone*. Avoidance of obstruent clusters will tend to make the verse flow smoothly and lyrically; such clusters will tend, in bulk, to slow it down, make it seem more strenuous and effortful, and the more consonants in the cluster, the more difficult it will be to enunciate. The kind of consonant matters, too: successive
plosives or stops (p, b, t, d, k, g) are particularly obstructive, as in “sweet brood” or “world draw”. The first of the following examples is clotted and sclerotic (that is, it has twelve obstruent clusters in four lines), reflecting its strenuous injunctions; the second is relatively free-flowing with just two in three lines, representing the Fairy Queen’s lyrical address to her beloved:

(10)

Devouring Time blunt thou the lion’s paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood,
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws,
And burn the long-lived phoenix, in her blood.  

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
Mine ear is much enamour’d of thy note;
So is mine eye enthrall’d to thy shape;

(Son. 19.1-4)

In ordinary speech we often simplify consonant clusters to ease the grinding gears of language: we would tend to say “An’ burn”, for example, in the fourth line. This natural tendency should be resisted in speaking verse, however, not just in the interests of clarity but also because it may eliminate expressive effects of this kind.

§1.2: Lexical Stress: Major, Minor and Weak

§1.2.1: Word Classes

Most of the words (by far) in a dictionary belong to the ‘lexical’ category (nouns, adjectives, derived adverbs, main verbs); these are words that have referential meanings you can look up and define, like descend, discreetly, foolish, wombat, jam (other terms you may come across for these are ‘full’, ‘dictionary’ or ‘content’ words). This is a huge category of words that is constantly changing through borrowing, coinage, obsolescence and so on. On the other hand, most occurrences of words in a given text (tokens, that is, rather than types) will be particles or ‘grammar’ words like of, the, you, and, should, is (ie prepositions, determiners, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, copulas, and so on), also called ‘function’ or ‘empty’ words; this is a small class of words that rarely or never changes. Grammar-words don’t mean or refer directly but rather connect and relate dictionary-words into phrases and sentences; if we think of dictionary words as numbers, grammar words are like the signs for addition, multiplication
and so on that convert strings of numbers into meaningful expressions: just as ‘3 + 5’ differs from ‘3 × 5’, so “the letter from Ted” is different from “a letter for Ted”.

§1.2.2: Major or ‘A’ Stress

Let’s go back once more to Juliet’s verse quoted in the introduction: “Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face” (RJ 2.2.85). Four of the words seem to have a kind of built-in prominence even in the most neutral and context-independent reading imaginable: “Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face”. These four words are the dictionary or lexical words in the verse: every dictionary word has one syllable, called the tonic syllable, which in isolation carries major stress (or A-stress): descénd, fóoish, wómbat, jám, discréetly.

The position of the tonic syllable in the word may distinguish grammatical categories: thus the end-stressed verbs abstráct, présént, impórt differ from the penultimately stressed nouns abstract, présént, import.7 It’s important to note that in connected speech (as opposed to citation of isolated words) there may be little or no actual physical prominence marking any particular stress: in part we perceive stress just because we expect it to be there. In a lecture I once played two brief digitally synthesised sentences, one using insult (a word in which the placement of stress does not affect the shape of the vowels) as a noun and one as a verb; though the word was generated in both cases by the same string of code, the large audience was willing to swear that they’d heard insult the first time and insúlt the second.

As everyone knows, in a few words the place of the tonic stress has changed since Shakespeare’s time. Ulysses, for example, must speak not of ►8 “Péaceful cómmerce from dividable shóres” but rather of “Péaceful commérce from dividable shóres” (TC 1.3.105), and Cerimon must say not “Apóllo, perféct me in the cháracters!” but “Apóllo, pérfect me in the charácters!” (Per. 3.2.67). These differences, however, are relatively few (affecting about 100 words), and are listed in full in Appendix A (Appendix B indicates the stressing of Shakespearean names where these are likely to puzzle a modern reader, especially one not from the British Isles).

§1.2.3: Minor or ‘B’ Stress

Some dictionary words have in addition a weaker kind of stress, by default preceding the tonic, called minor or B-stress: kângarôo, réfugée, fiftéen, únknówn. In connected speech a pre-main minor stress may swap positions

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7 In technical terms présent is an óxytône, présént is a paróxytône and présently is a próparóxytône.
with the major (under what is called the Alternating Stress Rule) to avoid adjacent major stresses: a new réfugée but Réfugée Céncil; kàngaroo cóurt but the fât kàngaróo; únknòwn lánds but lánds unknówn; the Mississíppi délta but the bróad Mississíppi.

Some Elizabethan words, like complete, have a pre-tonic stress that has been lost in modern English, which makes them subject to the Alternating Stress Rule, so that as well as the expected “She is a gallant creature, and cómpléte” (H8 3.2.49) we also find “A maid of grace and cómpléte májesty” (LLL 1.1.136). Such words are identified in Appendix A.

Minor stress may also occur after the tonic, as in súbjugàte or vílif; such words are not subject to the Alternating Stress Rule. The loss of post-tonic stress in words like móbémentàry, sérétàry, libràry which characterises Modern British English had already begun in Elizabethan English, but has not gone so far in General American, which remains in this (as in other features, such as sounding /r/ after vowels) closer to Shakespeare’s language: of the 40 uses of words ending in -tary (such as móbémentàry) in Shakespeare’s pentameter, for example, only seven reflect the loss of secondary stress. Note that compounds are words in their own right, so that the second stress in a word like bláckbird, hóusewìfe, shéaring-shèd or grándfàther is a minor stress.

For convenience of reference we may group A- and B- syllables together as ‘strong’ syllables.

Polysyllabic grammar-words will have minor stress on one syllable: àfter (B-o), becausè (o-B). This remains even where such words are reduced to monosyllables (gàinst, ’twìxt). Monosyllabic grammar-words fall into two groups: for largely historical reasons some have minor stress (usually when they retain some adverbial function, like off or since), and some have zero or weak stress; although both kinds of word sound fully stressed when uttered on their own, in normal speech the second group will be uttered with vowels reduced to schwa or /ɪ/. Thus while of and off seem to have the same stressed vowel when the words are uttered in isolation, compare “He tóok the weapon off the assáilant” (four stresses) with “He tóok the weapon of [əv] the assáilant” (three stresses). See Appendix C for a list of the two kinds.

§1.2.4: Weak or ‘O’ Stress

Monosyllabic grammar-words (with some exceptions listed in Appendix C) have weak or O-stress, as do the syllables of polysyllabic words that don’t carry major or minor stress: ârchtéctùrál, pólyúnsátürátèd, èpístèmológìcàl. Syllables with weak stress tend to be reduced to schwa.
§1.3: Accent: High and Low Syllables

The stress-pattern of a word or phrase is a fixture or given, something you can look up in a dictionary; to put it another way, it is a kind of factory default that you cannot customise. When we use language in particular situations, however, we often need to establish contrasts and emphases among the words we use, and to direct the listener’s attention to what is new or important in what we are saying. Obviously the invariant patterns of stress cannot do this, and so we must draw upon a second system of syllabic prominence, called ‘accent’, a rapid deflection of pitch that makes a syllable maximally prominent in performance.

§1.3.1: Normal or ‘Default’ Accent

Every complete utterance of English must contain at least one accent, or it will sound incomplete. Juliet’s line could stand as a complete utterance, and so must have an accent: the most obvious reading will put contextually motivated accent on the semantically most important word, ‘night’. In this case (a simple statement) the pitch movement is downwards, and it takes the rest of the line with it:

(11) ►
Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face.

We call this a low fall (\(\triangledown\)); it characterises simple assertions. If night starts higher and falls more dramatically it becomes a high fall (\(\triangleleft\)), marking emphasis or indicating surprise. In yes/no questions, on the other hand, the tail of the accent sweeps up in a high rise (\(\triangleright\)): listen to the two accents in the following exchange, a high rise followed by a high fall:

(12) ►
Have you found it? I’ve found it!

Where falling tones suggest completion, rising tones suggest incompleteness, open-endedness, contingency: the low rise is used to indicate that the speaker has more to say:

(13) ►
I’ve found it but I’m afraid it’s broken.
Accent differs from stress in an important way. Stress is a given or built-in feature of words whereas contextually motivated accent is something we do to words in contexts of use: the word *uncertain* will always be stressed on the second syllable, for example, but it might or might not be accented on either the first or the second syllable (though not the last) in any particular utterance of it.

§1.3.2: The Tone-unit: Breaks, Cuts, Cracks and Flaws

It will be noticed that the two parts of the last example are separated by a back-slash (\): this marks an intonational break, which is the boundary between successive intonational phrases or ‘tone-units’, each of which constitutes a ‘chunk’ of meaning and contains at least (and usually just) one accent. Every completed utterance of English will consist of at least one tone-unit, and every tone unit must contain an accent, which gives it its overall ‘tune’. This explains, incidentally, why the difference between, say, the grammar-word ‘in’ and the dictionary-word ‘inn’ may not be very obvious if you utter the words in isolation: a word spoken in isolation constitutes an utterance, which must contain a tone-unit, which must contain an accent; effectively, therefore, any word uttered in isolation will always sound maximally prominent.\(^8\) You can get a better idea of the contrast by uttering the words in some sort of context: “It’s the best room in the inn”.

Because a tone-unit is a chunk of meaning, intonational breaks can only occur at the boundaries of phrases or constituents, which are called cracks (#). For example, in “The course # of true love # never # did run # smooth” (*MND 1.1.134*) there are four cracks. Words with a crack between them are said to be adjacent. Cracks divide a sentence into its smallest intelligible constituent phrases; phrasal boundaries within those constituent phrases are called flaws (+): the prepositional phrase “#of true love#”, for example, consists of a noun phrase ‘true love’ and the preposition ‘of’, but since only one of these is an intelligible constituent phrase, they are contiguous (ie linked by a flaw: “The course # of + true love # never # did + run # smooth”). Note that there is a flaw between a verb and a clitic pronoun subject or object, as in “I + love + her” (cp “Fred # loves # Tess”). Flaws do not represent potential intonational breaks: ‘of’, for example, could never constitute a tone-unit. Finally, consecutive words within a phrase are joined: “The - course”, “true - love”.

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**Footnote:**

8 In the building where I work they recently installed a recorded PA system in the lifts that announces the floor that has been reached. Because the word *level* was recorded just once, however, in isolation from the numbers, what the voice actually says is not (for example) “level seven” in one tone-unit but “level\ se\ en\ seven\” in two. Users of the London Underground will be familiar with its peculiar injunction to “Mind \ the gap\.”
Even cracks, of course, are only potential breaks. There are two factors that
govern whether a crack becomes a break: the size of the tone-unit in question
(the average length of a tone-unit in English is about five words; only 20% are
longer than seven – see Crystal 1969, 256), and the importance of the crack.
The crack between subject and predicate ranks higher, for example, than that
between verb and object, because it produces more meaningful chunks: the
sentence “Hamlet(Subj.) # ordered(Verb) # the soup(Obj).” makes more sense
as ‘12 “Hamlet \ ordered the soup” than as “Hamlet ordered \ the soup”. In
the verse from *MND* the most important crack, that between subject and
predicate, divides the verse into a five-word sequence and a four-word one, so it
is the only logical place for a break in utterance: ‘13 “The course of true love \ never did run smooth \”.

A fairly elaborate subject may constitute a tone-unit in its own right:
“The much-respected former chairman of the municipal Council \ yesterday
announced a change of career \.”; this is a recognisable feature of newsreaders’
speech. For this reason, cracks after long subjects are sometimes given what we
would consider an inappropriate comma by writers and printers of Shakespeare’s
time (and by modern students). One would be surprised to see a comma after
the subject in “The man lives round here”, for example, but “The tall bearded
man who came to fix the roof last Thursday, lives somewhere round here” would
represent a common punctuational error.

However, because a tone-unit is, essentially, a more-or-less discrete chunk
of information, there are certain grammatical junctures at which a break is
obligatory, whatever the size of the resultant tone-unit: such junctures are
called cuts (words on either side of a cut are separated), symbolised as “‡”. In
utterance, every cut will become a break, but it is important not to conflate
the two levels of text and utterance (see §2.1). There is, obviously, a cut at
the end of each sentence or independent clause, and also at the boundaries
of interpolated or parenthetical material (text between brackets, dashes or
pairs of commas that can be removed without affecting the grammar or the
propositional content of the sentence), vocatives (*Luisa, † I’d like a word with you*) and commenting or linking adverbials (*Luckily, † he escaped; In my opinion, † the dog’s too fat; Nevertheless, † it rained*). Cuts usually (but not invariably) correspond to important pieces of punctuation: stops, em-dashes, brackets, colons, semi-colons, and frequently (though not always) commas:

(14)
I came, † I saw, † I conquered. †
Frankly, † my dear, † I don’t give a damn †
My friend – † you don’t know him † – speaks Greek, † fortunately. †

These sentences will produce the following utterances (with some options on the placing and direction of accents):

(15) ►14
I came, \ I saw, \ I conquered, \.
Frankly, \ my dear, \ I don’t give a damn \ (or give a damn if you’re Clark Gable)
My friend – \ you don’t know him – speaks Greek, \ fortunately. \.

Note that there is no need to pause at a break, though of course we may; it is sufficient that the intonational ‘tune’ of the utterance be interrupted (the boundary will also be marked by deceleration, so that “friend” in the last example will be longer than in (say) “My friend speaks Greek”). Cuts also occur at ellipses, as with ellipted *had* in the following:

(16)
Mary had a little lamb, † and Bill † the *boeuf bourgignon* †

In the same way, they are introduced at the site of a constituent that has been moved. There are no cuts in the default word-order (17), for example, but displacing *now* and *are* produces energising cuts in (18) at the site from which they were excised:

(17) ►15
Our brows + are + bound # with + victorious wreaths # now

(18)
Now † are + our brows † bound # with + victorious wreaths (R3 1.1.5)
One final complication (there’s always something): because tone-units tend to be about five words long (except in the ‘listing’ cases illustrated in (20)), a crack that is only one word away from a cut ceases to be even a potential break and is downgraded to a flaw (examples bolded and underlined):

(19)

Mutius: † And with # my sword # I’ll keep # this door safe. †

(Ophelia: He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. † Long stay’d he so. †

Chorus: Now we bear the King
Towards Callice; grant him there; there seen,

§1.3.3: Plonking

By default – that is, in the absence of any contextual information – the accent will fall on the last dominant (major stressed syllable) in the tone-unit. Because beginning readers of dramatic blank verse sometimes regard it as a kind of weird ceremonial language utterly detached from naturalistic habits of speech or normal contexts of meaning, they are tempted to place a low fall (or sentence-final tone) mechanically on the last stress of every line, often treating the whole line as a single tone-unit and keeping everything before the accent on a flat monotone. This habit of ‘plonking’ will reduce the most vibrant verse to monotonous artificiality: all lines sound more-or-less the same and no line acknowledges its neighbours. Since the low fall is the normal or default ending of a sentence, the auditory effect of plonking is that of ending every line with a full stop, effectively retarding any forward impetus or momentum. I have heard an amateur Goneril say:

(20) I love you more than words can wield the matter.
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty.
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare.

9 ‘Word’ here includes any ‘clitics’ or closely attached monosyllables: thus the word or in Spain would count as one ‘word’ each.
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour.
As much as child e’er lov’d, or father found.
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable.
Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (KL 1.1.55-61)

There’s no “glib and oily art” here: at the end of the first full line she appears to have finished the speech, and each line thereafter is a jerky new beginning. The effect is one of getting each line over with, as though it were a kind of chore; by aiming always at the end of the line it also underscores the fact that the actor is reciting, and dispels any illusion of spontaneous utterance. An actor who knows her business will begin with something like "I love you more than words can wield the matter," hitting the semantically important words (notice how here the alliteration guides one towards ‘wield’) and indicating by the low rise that there’s more to come.

It’s plonking, of course, that gives blank verse a bad name, by making it sound crude, artificial and amateurish. Nonetheless, it is based on a sound instinct: it preserves what Peter Hall calls the “sanctity of the line” and recognises, at least, the phenomenon of endweight: “Most of Shakespeare’s verse, early and late … has the crux – or the important meaning – in the last words of the line”. Nevertheless, there are better ways of doing this, such as ending on a low rise: “To drop the end of the line (or to allow it to droop in the depressed inflections of modern Estuary English) usually produces a line with little meaning and no impact” (Hall 2003, 28). In the words of Hamlet, “Pray you avoid it”.

The amateur Goneril gave just one tone-unit to each line of (20), but the seasoned actor will recognise a greater complexity. To some extent the way an utterance is divided into tone-units reflects grammatical structure: an adverbial that modifies the verb, telling us, for instance, how the action was performed, will tend to be part of the same tone-unit as its verb (“Joyfully they heard the news”), whereas an adverbial ‘disjunct’, commenting on the whole clause, will have its own tone-unit: “Hopefully they heard the news." Again, while independent clauses are separated by cuts, dependent clause boundaries may not even be cracks, depending on the meaning: “She + spoke # to + the - waiter + who + brought + the - soup †” suggests that the waiter has already brought the soup (because the ‘restrictive’ relative clause “+ who + brought + the - soup †” tells us which waiter she spoke to), whereas “She + spoke # to + the - waiter † who + brought + the - soup †” suggests that he brings it after she has spoken to him (we already know which waiter, so “† who + brought + the - soup †” merely adds information).

Each item in a list will be a separate tone-unit:
Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, …

We need pears, plums, oranges, figs and grapes.

§1.3.4: Contrastive and Focal Accent

If accent falls elsewhere than on the last stress, or takes on a more emphatic shape, its effect is to direct the listener's attention (the ‘focus’) towards what is important or new in the utterance and away from what is familiar, or given by the context. Suppose, for example, you were to enter a room and announce: “I’ve just been to the library and I’ve found something that might interest you.” Here accent falls in its default positions. But now suppose that you entered the same room and someone greeted you with “If you’re going to the library could you look something up for me?” To reply “I’ve just been to the library” would sound distinctly odd, as though you hadn’t heard the person. Because they have introduced the topic ‘library’ it has become ‘old’ information, and should consequently be de-emphasised in your response, with accent moving back to the previous stress: “I’ve just been to the library.” Note, by the way, that the word ‘library’ doesn’t need to have been spoken: it is the presence of the concept that matters. Your answer would be similar if the other person had said “You couldn’t take these books back for me, could you?”, where the idea ‘library’ is only implicit. If you have grasped the notion of focal accent and background information you will be in a position to explain the prosody of the following gag: “The Queen said she was delighted to be in Australia and then Prince Philip made a joke” (cp the expected “and then Prince Philip made a joke.”).

Another use of contextually motivated accent is to imply a contrast of some kind. If we say “Bill collects old books”, with a low fall on ‘books’, the accent is neutral and implies nothing. If, however, ‘books’ has a high fall (“Bill collects old books”) it implies a contrast (eg “not old records”): Similarly:

(22) 
Bill collects old books (implies something like: “not Harry”)
Bill collects old books (implies eg “but he doesn’t read them”)
Bill collects old books (implies eg “not new ones”)
Bill collects old books (implies eg “it’s Ted that prefers new ones”)

Note that contextually motivated accent is not confined to stresses; a function word that is being used contrastively may be accented, as in the remark about
Saddam Hussein’s surreptitiously videoed hanging: “Executions should be in cam, \ not on cam!” Affixes, too, may carry accent when used contrastively, as in Cleopatra’s rueful remark “In praising Antony I have disprais’d Caesar” (AC 2.5.107).

Finally, marked accent is used for emphasis: “Shut the doo\", an exasperated parent might bellow, not in order to contrast the door with some alternative aperture but simply to make the point more forcefully.

It is clear, then, that the appropriate placement of accent within the line is highly dependent on context, juggling the three systems of focus, contrast and emphasis. It is a characteristic mistake of beginning readers of verse to treat each line as a discrete unit, unrelated to its surroundings. In the following line, for example, it may be tempting to turn the crack after mercy into a break and make two tone-units, to bring out the two foci of meaning:

\[
(23) \text{The quality of mercy is not strain’d,} \\
\text{But one should never consider a line of Shakespeare apart from its context: in context, Portia’s assertion is a response to Shylock’s defiant “On what compulsion must I \[be merciful\]?” The idea of mercy is thus background information, and all the emphatic weight of her contradiction must fall upon the crucial word strained (‘forced, constrained’):}
\]

\[
(24) \text{The quality of mercy is not strain’d,} \\
\text{Note the low rise, which signals to the audience that an amplification of her remark is about to follow; using (where grammatically appropriate) low rises rather than low falls towards the end of the line keeps the forward momentum of the speech.}
\]

In trying to get a given line right it is easy to forget that it must be plugged into its context: encountering the line in isolation, for example, it is natural to say, as a kind of detached observation or sententia, “Roses have thorns,\ and silver fountains mud\”; as line 2 of Sonnet 35, however, it has to acknowledge its role in the argument and its relation to its context: “No more be griev’d at that which thou hast done: / Roses have thorns,\ and silver fountains mud,\ / Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,”. The contextually motivated accent on ‘roses’ establishes the contextual meaning ‘even roses [have flaws, so why not you?]’. One reason that some commercially available readings of the sonnets sound
rather lifeless and artificial (not to mention obscure) is that they don’t take into account this need for individual lines to acknowledge their surroundings through intonation.

Where the context is not explicit, it may need to be imagined. Take the very first verse of _MV_: one’s first impulse is to say:

(25) ▶

In _sooth_, \_ I know not why I am so _sad_; \_  

This hits what seems to be the semantically important word with the accent. But though it’s the first line of the play, it still has a presumed context, a discussion into which we have broken (most of Shakespeare’s middle to late plays begin ‘naturalistically’ in the middle of a conversation), in which Salerio and Solanio have been (at least implicitly) complaining that Antonio isn’t much fun nowadays (‘sad’ here means ‘grave’, ‘serious’, as much as ‘mournful’). Antonio will sound more like a person speaking to others, and less like someone reciting a poem, if he treats _sad_ as de-accented background information and says, with genuine protestation and an air of bafflement:

(26) ▶

In _sooth_, \_ I know not _why_ I am so _sad_; \_  

For the same reason, the first line of _Twelfth Night_ should not sound like the beginning of an academic lecture:

(27) ▶

If music be the food of _love_, \_ play on \_  

Rather, it should sound like a _response_ to the idea of music as the food of love that has already presented itself (or been presented) to Orsino, making that phrase (and the idea of music) background information and shifting the first accent onto the only terms left (‘if’ or ‘be’):

(28) ▶

If music _be_ the food of _love_, \_ play on \_  

The Sonnets are particularly prone to this kind of misreading, because their dramatic, argumentative and dialogic nature is concealed by their presentation as discrete poems; readers are only too likely to assert, plonkingly:
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(29) ➤25
My mistress’ eyes\ are nothing like the sun;\ × (Son. 130.1)

This a strange, decontextualised, seemingly pointless remark makes as much sense as walking into a room and announcing “My Welsh Corgi does not in any way resemble a budgerigar”. The line only really makes sense as part of a dialogue, a response to an imaginary interlocutor, some conventional Petrarchan poet who has just said something like “My mistress’ eyes are brighter than the sun”. *Sun, mistress and eyes* are all now background information, and *my* becomes contrastive (opposed to implied *your)*:

(30) ➤26
My mistress’ eyes\ are nothing like the sun\ ✓

(or, in a more contemporary voice, *nothing like*). Incidentally, because the sonnets often represent miniature self-contained dramas, they are excellent texts to practise dramatic speech on, as directors like Trevor Nunn and Peter Hall have pointed out.

Once crucial function of contrastive accent in Shakespeare is the pointing of antithesis, the rhetorical device that places two related terms in contrast and comparison within the line or pair of lines (eg “A bliss in proof, and prov’d, a very woe” [Son. 129.11]). Shakespeare is particularly fond of antithesis as way of organising meaning, and highlighting such antitheses not only clarifies the meaning for the listener but produces the effect of an intellect at work – and perhaps at play – rather than that of an actor reciting verse. The following passage, for example, I have heard performed as follows by an amateur actor who had not fully explored the relationships of meaning within it:

(31) ➤27
He after honour hunts, / I after love; /
He leaves his friends to dignify them more: /
I leave myself, my friends and all for love. ×

(*TGV* 1.1.63-65)

Here Proteus is comparing the choices he and his more adventurous friend Valentine have made. The meaning of this passage revolves around a number of antitheses to do with self and other, appearance and reality: *I :: he; honour :: love; leaves [apparently neglects] :: dignifies [actually honours]; leaves [apparently
neglects] :: leave [actually neglect]. To bring these antitheses out in performance (as far as one can) makes the speech come alive:

(32) ►
He after honour hunts, / I after love;/
He leaves his friends / to dignify them more:/
I leave myself, / my friends, / and all / for love.

And, of course, antithesis may exist between lines as well as within them. In the following line the BBC’s Isabella accents by default the last major stress, ‘giant’, but to do this is to overlook the previous line which makes ‘giant’ background information and contrasts having strength with using it:

(33) ►
Isabella: O, it is excellent / To have a giant’s strength! But it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.
Lucio: That’s well said. (MM 2.2.108)

But of course, as with everything, it can be overdone: Clive James writes of the BBC Hamlet:

Many a time and oft I was reminded of Robert Stephens’s classically over-explanatory first line as Oberon. “Ill-met (as opposed to well-met) by moonlight (as opposed to daylight), proud (not humble, like other Titania) Oberon had had the good fortune to meet in his time) Titania (not some other well-met fairy of equivalent high rank walking proudly in the moonlight in that particular forest)” (1983, 93)

Accenting every lexical word is not only absurd, but also futile, like tooting your car-horn in the cacophony of a Calcutta traffic-jam: where everything is highlighted, nothing is highlighted.

As an exercise, the reader might care to try marking up the tone-units for a possible reading of the following well-known passage:

(34)
To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ’Tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die – to sleep –
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. ’Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish’d. To die – to sleep.
To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub! (Ham. 3.1.55-64)

§1.4: Syntactic Stress

§1.4.1: Subordinate or ‘a’ Stress
To recap: one word is contiguous with another when no actual or possible syntactic break intervenes between them; words are adjacent when divided by a crack and separate when divided by a cut (see 1.3.2). When two major (A) syllables are contiguous, one will be subordinated to (ie weaker than) the other. If they are joined into a new word (a compound), the second is subordinated: a blackbird, the Whitehouse, Church Street (pattern A-B); if they are contiguous in a phrase, as in the case of an adjective and its noun, the first is subordinated: a black bird, the white house, Church Road (a-A). A major will not be subordinated to a following subordinate stress, however, so that Fréd’s old dog, three large houses will have the pattern A a-A. We need to remember, of course, that a crack that is one word removed from a cut becomes a flaw:

(35)
We shall be cánd’d + purgers, † not múrderers. (JC 2.1.180)
And let the sōul + fórth † that adoreth thee, (R3 1.2.177)
For had I cúrs’d + nów, † I had curs’d myself. (R3 1.3.319)

Where two majors are separated by a cut, of course, no subordination takes place:

(36)
The wisest àunt, † têlling the saddest tale, (MND 2.1.51)
Gently to bêar, † kîndly to judge, our play. (H5 1.0.34)
Now are our bróws † bóund with victor’ous wreaths, (R3 1.1.5)
Love is a smóke † máde with the fume of sighs;
Being purg’d, a fire † spârkling in lovers’ eyes;
Being vex’d, a sée † nóurish’d with lovers’ tears. (RJ 1.1.190-92)
§1.4.2: Inhibited or ‘Ô’ Stress

Weak syllables contiguous with subordinated or a-syllables, like ‘in’ in the phrase ‘in great haste’ (Ô-a-A), are not completely dominated but inhibited (Ô) instead: inhibition is a weaker form of domination which strongly discourages but does not absolutely exclude a beat falling on that syllable. Weak syllables separated from a preceding dominant by a potential intonational break (a crack), like ‘in’ in ‘Jump # in + the pool’, are also inhibited. See §7.2.1.

§1.5: Beats: The Timing of Syllables

When we count, or list items, our speech has a very pronounced rhythm, with the accented syllables occurring at regular intervals: “¹Pears, ⁄ ²plums, ⁄ ³oranges, ⁄ ⁴figs ⁄ and ⁵grapes.”

These periodic recurrences of intensity are called ‘beats’: they are not directly features of sound but rather of the muscular organisation of speech, sympathetically perceived by the listener (very roughly, they represent squeezes of the air-sac in the lungs). Those who accompany their speech with gestures will tend to time those gestures on the beats.

Repeated muscular activity tends to fall into a regular periodic rhythm: it takes more effort to walk (for example) without equal timing than with it. Notice here the way in which ‘oranges’ is compressed and ‘pears’ extended so that they occupy roughly the same time-interval. This tendency towards the regular timing of beats [technical term: ‘isochrony’], though prominent in listing and counting, is in ordinary speech easily disrupted by pauses, hesitations, and so on, and present more in perception than in reality. Nonetheless it does exist, and is an important part of the organising system of metre.

Regular timing is less evident (though still present) when the beats fall mainly upon stresses that are not carrying accent:

(37)

The ¹tráin on ²plátform ³five ⁴is the ⁴séven-⁵twénty to ⁶Lóndon.

If stresses and beats could be completely identified in this way, it would make English metre very simple; it would also, however, make it very monotonous and mechanical, and Shakespeare would probably have rejected it in favour of prose. It is partly in the interesting slippage between these two categories that Shakespeare’s metre finds its life and energy. It is often said, for example, that iambic pentameter is a five-stress line, but a pentameter can have anything from two to ten stressed syllables:
What all pentameters must have, however, is the capacity to be uttered with five beats, and while beats most often fall on stressed syllables they may fall on unstressed ones, and even on silence.

§1.5.1: Stress, Accent and Beats

To begin with, beats tend to fall on independent (A and B) stresses, not on subordinated (a) stresses: “I 1mét an old 2friend \ in New 3York\”, where old friend and New York are both a-A. The exception would be ‘public announcement’ style, in which virtually every stress gets a beat: “The 1train on 2platform 3five \ is the 4seven-twenty to 6Kings 7Cross\”. Accent will, however, make a subordinate stress independent and attract the beat onto it and away from the independent stress: “I 1mét your 2new friénd\ in the 3park to4dý\”.

English has a tendency to alternate beats and off-beats where possible, even in the case of strings of adjacent stresses: “1New South 2Wales”, “an 1old black 2dog” (you could say “an 1old, 2black, 3dog” but it would sound odd and distinctly ‘marked’). This only applies, however, when the stresses belong in the same tone-unit; where they are separated by cuts the rule does not apply (“1Pears, 2plums, 3oranges\”; “My 1lawyers are 2Smith, 3Smith, 4Smith, 5Smith, 6Smith, 7Blenkinsop\”).

It is also the case that the number of beats in an utterance will depend in part upon tempo and formality: the slower and the more formal, the more beats there will be. If the station announcer were in a hurry, however, he or she might say (with a little gabbling) in one tone-unit: “The 1train on platform 2five is the 3seven-twenty to 4London\”.

§1.5.2: Unstressed Beats

Take the utterance “She’s the 1only 2Latinist in the 3Faculty\”; it has three beats, with four syllables between beats number two and three. If you revise it to “She’s the 1only A2méricanist in the de3partment\”, there are now six syllables between beats two and three, which regular timing turns into a terrible gabble (four or five is about the maximum tolerable). The normal solution in everyday English is what is called Beat Addition, the addition of a beat on a weak syllable:
Note that this is very different from the occurrence of contextually motivated accent on ‘in’, which would occur if this sentence were uttered as a response to (say) “She could get help for her Whitman thesis from someone in the department” (where ‘the department’ is de-emphasised as background information and the accent falls earlier by default):

\[(40)\]  
She’s the 1ónly A2méricanist 3in the de4pártment  

Beat addition, unlike accent, is perceptually a very subtle thing; here it requires no more than a mere slowing of the tempo over the stretch ricanist in the de and a slightly more precise enunciation of the vowel in ‘in’.

One secret of the flexibility of iambic pentameter is that it co-opts the process of beat addition to place beats on weak syllables that would never be candidates for it in ordinary non-metred speech, as in the case of ‘and’ and ‘of’ in the first line of (38) above. The only place where beat addition is impossible is on a weak syllable contiguous with a dominant (ie with no crack intervening): an unstressed syllable in this position is said to be ‘dominated’. Any unstressed syllable that is not dominated is said to be ‘independent’, capable of carrying a beat. In the following verse, dominants are bolded, and unstressed ones are in roman type; dominated syllables are bracketed with their dominants, and independent syllables are underlined: “[Absént thee] from [félici]ty [a while]” (Ham. 5.2.346). It will be noticed that independent syllables occur in this verse regularly in even-numbered positions.

§1.5.3  Silent Beats

Since beats are not a form of sound, but of muscular activity, a means of organising utterances in time, they may (unlike stress and accent) fall upon silence (indicated throughout by an exclamation mark between angle brackets [<!>]). If we take the two sentences about the waiter and the soup mentioned above, we see that the second version, in which the waiter brings the soup after being spoken to, has an extra beat falling in the pause between the tone-units:

\[(41)\]  
She 1spoke to the 2waiter who 3brought the 4soup  
She 1spoke to the 2waiter 3<!> who 4brought the 5soup.
As Derek Attridge has shown, silent beats are a structural feature of what is called simple or 'demotic' verse – children’s rhymes, weather saws, advertising jingles, protest chants and the like – where the lines most usually have four beats, the last beat sometimes silent (you can test this by tapping a pencil to the beat as you recite them):

(42) ►₃₄

1Hiₖkory, 2diₜkory, 3dɔk: ₄<!>

The 1mouse ran 2up the 3clock. ₄<!>

The 1clock struck ₂one, the ₃mouse ran ₄down:

₁Hiₖkory, 2diₜkory, 3dɔk: ₄<!>

A 1maḥo young ₂cowboy called ₃Tex ₄<!>

Was ar₁raigned for ex²posing his ₃sex; ₄<!>

But the ₁judge, with a ₂snort, threw the ₃case out of ₄court,

For non ₁curat de ₂minimis ₃lɛx. ₄<!>₁₀

₁What do we ²want? ₃Ten per ₄cent!

₁When do we ²want it? ₃Now! ₄<!>

Sometimes silent beats may be situated more creatively, as in the case of the old English football chant about George Best or the Australian industrial protest chant:

(43)

₁Geₐ₉gᵊₑˌs ₂Beₐ₉t! ₃Geₐ₉gᵊₑˌs ⁴Beₐ₉t!

₁Geₐ₉gᵊₑˌs ₂<!> ₃Geₐ₉gᵊₑˌs ⁴Beₐ₉t!

₁wₒₜkᵊrₐs ²<!> ₃nᵊₐtᵊeₐd ⁴<!>

₁nₑvᵊr ²be ⁴fᵊtᵊd! ⁴<!>

Because such verse is heavily isochronous, approaching the regular timing of song or chant, the silent beats are sufficiently indicated by timing.

₁₀Latin legal tag: ‘the law does not concern itself with very small matters’.
2. Pentameter and its Common Variations

Hotspur: I had rather be a kitten and cry mew
Than one of these same metre ballad-mongers. . . .
Tis like the forc’d gait of a shuffling nag

(Henry IV, Part 1, 3.1.127-33)

A strange and rather literal-minded (but widespread) misconception about iambic pentameter is that the term can only be properly applied to lines with alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, like “Óf hánd, óf fóot, óf líp, óf éye, óf brów” (Son. 106.6), and that any line deviating from this pattern represents an ‘exception’, an ‘irregularity’ or a ‘metrical licence’. As Roman Jakobson (1960) has observed, one of the fundamental structuring devices of art is repetition with variation: there must be enough repetition to suggest a pattern, and thus stimulate interest, with enough variation to maintain that interest. Regulated variation is the life of pentameter: it is what makes it simultaneously ordered and lively, where other kinds of metre in English (some of which are discussed in Chapter 6) tend to be either ordered or lively.

§2.1: The Prototype: Verse and Line

Metre is a way of representing or embodying simple patterns in the relatively complex prosodic material of speech: this is normally done by regulating just one aspect of the prosody into basic structures of alternation and recurrence, and letting the other aspects fend for themselves. The result is not in itself simple, but is a representation of simplicity in and through complexity which is aesthetically pleasing.

The main prosodic feature regulated in English metre is the beat (§1.5): because the placement of beats in English is constrained but not completely determined by the given prosody – stress, syntax, contextually determined
accent – metre is not passively or automatically present in the verse but actively re-created by the reader or performer in the act of speaking the lines (aloud or in the head). It is not only a question of what a verse intrinsically is, that is, in terms of stress, obligatory accent and syntactic divisions; it is also a question of what you can make of it (within the constraints of English). Take, for example, the following verses; we could, if we chose, read them as rough four-beat lines with a break (||) in the middle, in the manner of Middle English alliterative verse (I have seen a *Romeo and Juliet* where the prologue was performed quite effectively as rap):

(44) ►

To 1be, or 2not to be || 3that is the 4question:
1Whether ’tis 2nobler || in the 3mind to 4suffer
The 1slings and 2arrows || of out3rageous 4fortune,
Or to 1take 2arms || against a 3sea of 4troubles,

(Ham. 3.1.55-8)

If experienced readers give it a five-beat reading it is not because the linguistic structure of the verse compels such a reading, but rather because that reading is more rewarding, particularly in the context of drama: at the same time it is more engagingly complex and closer to the rhythms of natural speech (the four-beat reading becomes more strained and artificial in the lines that follow: “The 1heartache and the 2thousand || 3natural 4shocks”). It is also because a vast weight of cumulative evidence suggests that this is what the poet intended, and doing what the poet seems to have intended must at least be worth a try.

Because many pentameter verses can be read as four-beat lines, some critics have asserted that that is what they ‘really’ are, but this is a confusion of ideas: they are what we can make them, within the constraints of their prosodic form. The important question is whether they can be read with five beats: an Elizabethan manual of versifying pointed out that the following verse doesn’t work as a pentameter, for example, and the reason is simple: there are only four independents (bolded) – and so four possible beats – in the whole verse: “Your 1meaning I 2under3stand by your 4eye”.1 Each of the non-bolded syllables is dominated by the stressed syllable next to it. In theory it might be possible (with a lot of crude forcing and artificiality) to perform a whole play as four-

---

1 George Gascoigne, *Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575). Gascoigne does not, of course, have the conceptual equipment to point out what has gone wrong: he can only dismiss the line intuitively, as “neither true nor pleasant”.
beats lines, but it would be as clear a violation of artistic intention as we could hope to find, and the reason we might choose not to do it is not bardolatrous reverence but the perception that Shakespeare was a subtle dramatic artist and that his rhythmical choices are worth attending to because they produce interesting and valuable effects in the theatre.

For this reason we need to distinguish the performed pattern of syllables carrying beats and off-beats (the line) from its raw material or input, the prosodic base (with its given pattern of stress, accent and syntactic juncture) that underlies it (the verse). As performers we co-operatively turn verses into lines; often one verse may give rise to more than one line (which is why we always need to bear in mind that our first analysis of a line may not be the only – or the best – one possible).

The abstract pattern that underlies pentameter consists of a ‘grid’ of ten syllable-positions, each either O[dd] or E[ven]:

\[
O_1 E_2 O_3 E_4 O_5 E_6 O_7 E_8 O_9 E_{10}
\]

This is traditionally, economically and conveniently thought of as a sequence of five feet, each consisting of an Odd position and an Even position. Each position is occupied by a slot, prototypically w in O-position and S in E-position, producing the prototypical pattern, or ‘matrix’:

\[
\text{The Matrix: } w-S w-S w-S w-S w-S
\]

Normally each of these ten slots will be occupied by just one syllable, but under certain circumstances a slot may be occupied by two (§1.1), or by none (see chapters 4 and 5). A verse is a string of syllables that can be related to or mapped onto this underlying pattern or matrix (or one of its derivative templates), point for point. The prototypical verse is a sequence of ten syllables, alternately unstressed and fully stressed (“And bárren ráge of Déath’s etérnal cóld” [Son. 13.12]).

A prototypical verse is naturally performed as a prototypical line, which is an utterance, bounded by intonational breaks, consisting of ten syllables, where the even-numbered syllables carry a beat and the odd-numbered ones do not: And $^1$barren$^2$ rage of$^3$Death’s eternal$^5$cold.$^2$ This is the simplest possible

---

$^2$ Such feet are termed ‘iambs’ – hence the term ‘iambic pentameter’, where penta- derives from the Greek for ‘five’, and -meter from metron, a measure.
representation of (46) in speech, but it is not in any sense a ‘typical’ form: since there are several ways of producing a beat or an offbeat, prototypical verses are considerably rarer than prototypical lines. There are just six prototypical verses, for example, in the first scene of *Hamlet* F1 (ie three per cent of the scene):

(47)

And let us once again assail your ears,  
And let us hear Bérnardó speak of this.  
As stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,  
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad  
The nights are wholesome, then no plânëts strike,  
But look, the morn, in rûssët mántlé clåd,

It is significant that three of the six occur close together at the end of the scene, to express the sense of restored order and calmness after the ghost’s exit. All other kinds of pentameter represent variations of one kind or another on this prototype: either variations in the sequence of beats and offbeats (metrical variation: each such variation is a switch) or variations in the ways that those beats and offbeats are embodied in the line (prosodic variation: each such variation is a shift).

Scansions like those of (47) are rather fussy, in that they mark every syllable, and at the same time not very revealing because they are too busy with redundant information. A better way to indicate the structure of the verse is to indicate the foot divisions with (say) a vertical solidus (|); if we assume in the first instance that the first syllable in the foot will be unstressed and the second stressed, we need only mark deviations from this pattern, simplifying and clarifying the notation without loss of information:

(48)

And let us once again assail your ears,  
As stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,  
But look, the morn, in rûssët mántlé clåd,

---

3 Why *ru|set man|tle* (rather than, say, *russ|et ma|ntle*)? Briefly, internal syllables begin with a consonant where possible, which rules out *russ|et, but cannot begin with a cluster that does not begin words (no *ma|ntle because we cannot have *ntle). The asterisk is a linguistic convention indicating a badly formed example.
It is crucial to emphasise that these purely notional foot-divisions are a kind of scaffolding, irrelevant to the performance of the verse. They do not necessarily correspond to pauses or boundaries of any kind (there could hardly be one inside ru|sset), nor need they coincide at all with punctuational or syntactic cuts, any more than the lines on an architect’s blueprint need correspond to cracks or fissures in the fabric of the building.

Before we consider metrical and prosodic variation we must remember that avoidance of variations is in itself a meaningful choice, as the examples in (47) show: the effect may be (as here) to suggest peace and calm. If we look at Marcellus’ serene evocation of Christmas Eve, for example, we find that its eight lines have no switches at all and only seven shifts, and that two lines are prototypical and four only one shift away from prototypicality. Moreover, the first and last lines are examples of a peculiarly serene (but relatively rare) form known as the Golden Line (§2.4.3):

(49) ►

It fa|ded ān| the cro|wing ōf| the cock|.
Sõme say| that e|ver, ’gainst| that sea|son comes|
Wherein| our Sa|viour’s birth| is ce|lebra|ted,
The bird| of daw|ning sing|eth all| night long|,
And then|, they say|, no spir|t can walk| abroad|,
The nights| are whole|some, then| no pla|nets strike|,
No fa|ry takes|, nor witch| hath pow|r| to charm|,
So ha|llow’d, ānd| so gra|cious, īs| the time|.

(Ham. F1 1.1.157-164)

§2.2: Changing the Pattern (Metrical Variation)

The simplest kind of variation consists in transforming the prototypical metrical pattern (w-S w-S w-S w-S w-S), also called the matrix, by switching adjacent slots so as to produce another pattern, or template, which is then perceived as related to or derived from the matrix.

---

4 This text is based on F1, which many take to be a revision, possibly authorial, of Q2 (see Wells and Taylor 1988, 653). It is significant, therefore, that the three substantive revisions of this passage in F1 all promote prototypicality by removing stresses from odd positions (This to The (160), dare sturre to can walke (161), and that to the (164)). The opening bracket (lunette) in ce|lebra|ted (line 159) indicates a ‘feminine ending’ (see §2.2.5).
§2.2.1: The Reversal

If we take the matrix as a series of five feet, any foot or Odd-Even pair in the matrix may be reversed (from w-S to S-w) to form a new template, provided that each reversed foot is followed by a non-switched or default syllable-slot – that is, a w in Odd –, presumably as a way of restoring the disrupted pattern and allowing us to relate the derived template to the matrix. This will, of course, rule out successive and final reversals. In the case of a reversal (signified by angle brackets) the default prosodic configuration is A-o, where lowercase o indicates that the unstressed syllable is dominated by the neighbouring stressed or A-syllable. The most commonly reversed foot is the first, occurring obligatorily in about 15% of lines and optionally in another 20% or so (the percentages vary over Shakespeare’s career):

(50)

1. \(<\textbf{Pointing}>\) to each| his thun|der, rain| and wind|,  
   \textit{(Son. 14.6)}
2. \(<\textbf{Music}>\) to hear|, why hear|st| thou mu|sic sad|ly?  
   \textit{(Son. 8.1)}
3. \(<\textbf{Romë}>o! Hu|mours! Mad|man! Pa|ssion! Lo|ver|  
   \textit{(RJ 2.1.7)}
4. \(<\textbf{Borne on}>\) the bier| with white| and brist|ly beard|:  
   \textit{(Son. 12.8)}

Least commonly reversed is the second foot, but reversals of the third and fourth are not rare:

(51)

1. \(<\textbf{All tongues}>\) speak of| him, ând| the blea|red sights|  
   \textit{(Cor. 2.1.205)}
2. \(<\textbf{The wisest aunt}>\) telling| the sad|dest tale|,  
   \textit{(MND 2.1.51)}
3. \(<\textbf{When lofty trees}>\) I see| barren| of leaves|,  
   \textit{(Son. 12.5)}
4. \(<\textbf{My love}>\) shall | my verse| ever| live young|.
   \textit{(Son. 19.14)}
5. \(<\textbf{Then Hamlet does}>\) it not|, <Hamlet> denies| (it.  
   \textit{(Ham. 5.2.236)}

In the last line the reversal serves to make the second “Hamlet” more emphatic. Double reversals are possible provided they are not consecutive:

(52)

1. \(<\textbf{Gently}>\) to hear|, \(<\textbf{kindly}>\) to judge|, our play|.  
   \textit{(H5 1.0.34)}
2. \(<\textbf{Hate of}>\) my sin|, \(<\textbf{grounded}>\) on sin|ful lov|ing:  
   \textit{(Son. 142.2)}
3. \(<\textbf{Met we}>\) on hill|, in dale|, \(<\textbf{forest}>\), or mead|,  
   \textit{(MND 2.1.83)}
4. \(<\textbf{Wanton}>\) as youth|ful goats|, \(<\textbf{wild as}>\) yòung bulls|,  
   \textit{(1H4 4.1.103)}
The reversals we have so far dealt with have been obligatory: forced, that is, by the stress-patterns of the verse (about one in five verses will have at least one obligatory reversal). Where a foot consists of two fully independent syllables we have two possible lines we can perform, one with a reversal and one without. We indicate an optional reversal in scanning the verse by putting it between an angle bracket and a solidus:

(53)
\[
<\text{But as}| \text{the ri|per shoul|d} \text{ by time} | \text{decease}|,
\]
\[
<\text{Sap check|d} | \text{with frost} | \text{and lust|y leaves} | \text{quite gone}|,
\]

Surprisingly, almost 30% of Shakespeare’s pentameters contain an optional reversal, though which of the options you choose will be essentially an interpretive matter: because we get into a kind of iambic gear when reading Shakespeare most such options are unlikely to be taken up in performance, but it’s always worth exploring the possibility of a reversal, since they make the lines more lively. If we take a pair of unstressed syllables like “thou art”, we find that most of the time the beat is determined by the metre, even where one of the syllables is accented (to perform the sixth line metrically requires putting a little spin on “art”). Where the metre does not specify a reading, as in the case of the last two examples of (54), it’s always worth trying a reversal:

(54)  ➤
\[
<\text{Guilty}> \text{thou ārt}| \text{of mur|der and| of theft}|,
\]
\[
Ó \text{Ju|lus Cae|sar, thō|u} \text{ art migh|ty yet}!\]
\[
\text{For thō|u} \text{ art co|vetous}, \text{ and he| is kind},\]
\[
<\text{How can}> \text{I then| be el|der than| thou ārt}?\]
\[
\text{Farewell}|! <\text{thou ārt} | \text{too dear} | \text{for my} | \text{posse}|(ssing,\]
\[
<\text{Thou art} | \text{a scho|lar, speak} | \text{to ĭt}|, \text{Hora|tio.}\]

Reversals carry an element of surprise – a beat where we expect an offbeat – and in consequence can have a button-holing, attention-grabbing effect. From early in his career Shakespeare used initial reversals as an arresting way of beginning important speeches and even plays themselves (Globe audiences were probably not as respectful and attentive as their modern descendants waiting reverently in a darkened theatre):
The surprise of a reversal may highlight in performance the peremptory or urgent nature of a command. Compare, in R3 1.2, the dignified calm of Lady Anne’s initial instruction to the pallbearers (“Sèt down|, sèt down| your ho|noura|ble load|”, 1.2.1) with the more importunate commands that ensue:

(R3 1.2.33)

<Stay, you> that bear| the corse|, and set| it down|. (R3 1.2.33)

Unma|nner’d dog|! <stand thou>, when I| command|:

(R3 1.2.39)

<Curse not> thyself|, fair crea|ture – thōu| art both|. (R3 1.2.132)

<Out of> my sight, <thou dost| infect| mine eyes|! (R3 1.2.148)

<Teach not> thy lips| such scorn|, <for they| were made| (R3 1.2.171)

<Nay, do> not pause|: for I| did kill| KingHen|(ry− (R3 1.2.179)

<Take up> the sword| again|, or take| up me|. (R3 1.2.183)

<Speak it> again|, and e|ven with| the word|, (R3 1.2.188)

<Bid me> farewell|. / ’Tis more| than yōu| deserve|; (R3 1.2.222)

Reversals often have a vocative function: that is, the slight surprise is used to seize the attention of the addressee, particularly when issuing commands:

(H8 3.2.440)

<Cromwell>, I charge| thee, fling| away| ambi|(tion! (H8 3.2.440)

<Gentle>men, rise|, his High|ness ɪs| not well|. (Mac. 3.4.51)

<Huntsman>, I charge| thee, ten|der well| my hounds|; (TS Ind.1.16)

<Lady>, vouchsaf|e to lis|ten what| I say|.

(1H6 5.3.103)

<Madam>, bethink| you like| a care|ful mo|ther (R3 2.2.96)
2. Pentameter and its Common Variations

<Madam>, and pretty mistress, give ear: (LLL 5.2.286)

<Merchant> of Syracuse, plead no more. (CE 1.1.3)

<Romans>, forget your to mēl. (Tit. 1.1.257)

<Sirrah>, cōme hi[ther. Make] no more| ado| (Tit. 4.3.102)

<Traitor>, restore Lavi|nā tō| the Em|peror (Tit. 1.1.296)

<Brother>, a word|! Descend|. <Brother>, I say|! (KL 2.1.32)

Reversals in general impart energy to the verse: Lear’s ferocious denunciation of Cordelia gains part of its mad vigour from the high proportion of obligatory and potential reversals it contains (the large number of obligatory ones encourages the reader to perform the optional ones also as reversals):

(58) ►

<Let it> be so|: thy truth| then bē| thy dow|r|;
<For by> the sa|cred ra|diance ēf| the sun|, …
<Here I> disclaim| <all my> pater|nal care|, …
<And as> a stranger to my heart and me
<Hold thee> from this| for e|ver. \ The bar|brous Scy|th'an,
<Or he> that makes| his ge|neration me|sses
To gorge| his a|petite|, <shall to> my bo|som
<Be [as well] neigh|bour’d, pi|ty’d, and| reliev’d|,

As thou, my sometime daughter. (KL 1.1.108-20)

In the following example, Shakespeare might easily have written “The Earl| of Salis|bur|y| doth crave| supply|” or “requires| supply|”; the reversal on “craveth”, even more marked by following a weak beat (a weak syllable that carries a beat – see §2.3.1), draws attention to the urgency of the earl’s situation:

(59)

The English army is grown weak and faint;
The Earl| of Salis|bur|y| <craveth> supply|
And hardly keeps his men from mutiny, (1H6 1.1.160)

§2.2.2: Performing Medial Reversals

The engaging rhythmic complexity of the pentameter derives from the phenomenon described by Gerard Manly Hopkins as ‘counterpoint’: subliminally, we perceive the variations of each line in terms of the ‘expected’ prototype,
which produces what has been described as “a kind of mental tugging, a sense of two things happening at once”. In simple verse like the nursery rhyme, and compound verse like anapests, the timing of beats is governed by an intensified regularity, which means in effect that they recur at roughly equal intervals of time. In the pentameter, however, the beat of a reversed foot is not just a beat but a beat-in-place-of-the-expected-offbeat, and for this reason ought to be slightly displaced: it should occur a little earlier, that is, than it would in demotic verse or fully naturalistic speech. In the BBC 1H4, the second-last line of (60) is uttered so that the beats on smooth, oil, soft and down occur at roughly equal intervals, and the effect is to disrupt the counterpoint of the line:

\[(60)\]
\[
A \text{ king}\text{for a stage}, \dagger <\text{princes} to act>, \quad (H5\ 1.0.3)
\]
\[
<\text{Carry}> \text{them here} \text{and there}, \dagger <\text{jumping} o'er times>, \quad (H5\ 1.0.29)
\]
\[
<\text{Bold in}> \text{the quarr\ell's right}, \dagger <\text{rous'd} to} \text{the en\coun}{\text{ter},} \quad (KL\ 2.1.54)
\]
\[
<\text{Which hath} \text{been smooth} \text{as oil}, \dagger <\text{soft as} y\oung down}, \quad (1H4\ 1.3.7)
\]
\[
A \text{lovel}y \text{boy} \dagger <\text{stol'n from}> \text{an In\d'\an king}; \quad (MND\ 2.1.22)
\]

As the last line of (60) shows, cuts are not always indicated in the punctuation. The reversals in (60) are ‘natural’ reversals: two dominants (in Even-Odd position) separated by a cut will both naturally be realised as beats in performance. However, where Even-Odd major syllables are adjacent (ie with only a crack between them) and flanked by weak ones, we have what is called a harsh mapping (§2.3.4), a subordinate (a-)stress in an S-slot: since in speech we don’t put beats on a-syllables, we need to be careful in performance to make both beats perceptible, and the way to do this is to make the crack into an intonational break. The first line of (61), for example, could be performed unmetrically as “Tell them that God bids us do good for evil.”, or metrically, as “Tell them that God bids us do good for evil.”: if you don’t slow down at God but run it straight into bids the line will sound unmetrical:

5 Dr Rowena Fowler, private communication (1977).

6 English metres fall into three classes: simple metres (as in the case of nursery rhymes or protest chants), where only the number of beats in the line is regulated (“One, two, buckle my shoe!”); compound metres, which regulate the number of beats in the line and also the number of offbeats between each pair of beats within the line (“The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold”), and complex metres like iambic pentameter, which regulate the number of beats in the line and the number of syllable positions, but allow some interesting dislocation between the two levels, so that a beat expected in a given even-numbered position may occur in the preceding or following odd position.
Note that this doesn’t apply when the Even major has a preceding contiguous (and thus subordinate) major, because that forces the Even major to be a dominant:

(62)

And yet| dark night| # <strangles> the trawling lamp|.
And in| mine own| love’s strength| # <seem to> decay|,
And [the firme] sóil| # <wín of> the watery main|,

Sonnets 107.8 (“And peace proclaims # olives of endless age.”) is a ‘garden path’ verse that can initially mislead the performer: as we read it we initially predict there will be a cut after the object “olives” and thus a subordinate stress on “proclaims” (“And peace proclaims + olives “), but then discover that the object of “proclaims” is not “olives” but “olives of endless age”: “And peace proclaims # olives of endless age.” The same thing is true of “Wherein he puts | # <alms for> oblivion|,” (61).

Where the Even syllable is unstressed, as in (63), a natural reading will produce four-beat lines even when the reversal is preceded by a cut (‘Be as thy presence is gracious and kind)’, and to read the line metrically it will be necessary both to decelerate on the preceding S-syllable and to pause distinctly after it:

(63)

<Be as| thy presence| is| \ <gracious> and kind|,
I h’ve seen| thee stern|, <and thou| hast oft| beheld|
<Heart-hard>ning spectacles|; \ <tell these> sad wo|men
Gréat tyranny|, \ <lay thou> thy basis sure|,

Even more intervention is necessary when only a crack divides a weak beat from a reversal: to prevent verses like (64) from becoming four-beat lines we
must protect the preceding weak S-syllable from domination by decelerating on it and by (again) turning the crack into an actual break in performance (Olivier, in his film of *Henry V*, fails to do this in the first line of the following):

(64)

> Call in| the me|ssengĕrs| # <sent from> the Dāu|(phin. |

His tears| pûre me|ssengĕrs| # <sent from> his heart|

The Earl| of Salis|bury| # <craveth> supply|

And yŏu| an o|fficĕr| # <fit for> the place|.

Did Je|ssică| # <steal from> the weal|thy Jew|,

But this remedy is not available when there is not even a crack between the two; in the case of such ‘harsh’ mappings (a/S), the best thing to do is to prolong the subordinated S-syllable (*fair*, *wild*, *strong*, etc) – the effect of this is to throw a degree of emphasis on it:

(65)

> I like| not făir| + < térms and| a vi|llain’s mind|.

> Taming| my wild| + <chărt to| thy lo|ving hand|

Resem|bling strŏng| +<yŏuth in| his mi|ddle age|,

And trou|ble dĕaf| + <hēa|n with| my boot|less cries|,

<Flying| between| the cóld| + <móon and| the earth|

<Quench’d in| the chăste| + <béams of| the wa|t’ry moon|,

*Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,*

That mak’s| my blŏod| ± <cóld, \ and> my hair| to stare|?

<We shall| be càll’d| ± <púrgers>, † not mur|derĕrs|

With such lines you can try hesitating slightly at the flaw, and seeing whether the result sounds okay. It’s probably worth investigating this possibility for any given instance, because it may reveal an embedded stage direction; in the last line of (65), for instance, a slight hesitation can suggest Brutus’ groping for an appropriate euphemism.

It is also worth investigating in these cases whether the preceding S-syllable might receive contextually motivated accent; it doesn’t work in (65) but it does in (66):

(66)

> Warwick: I pluck| this white| - rose # wth| Planta|genĕt|.
2. Pentameter and its Common Variations

Suffolk: <I pluck> this red - rose # [with young] So|mersët], (IH6 2.4.36-7)
Richmond: <We will| unite| the White - Rose † and| the Red]. (R3 5.5.19)
Kent: Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
He’ll shape| his old - course # in| a coun|try new]. (KL 1.1.187)
<Sparing> would show| a worse - sin # [than ill] doc|(trine. (H8 1.3.60)
But hear| these ill - news # with| the ears| of Clau|d'o. (MAN 2.1.173)

In such cases you can reverse the foot following the accent but need not, because a beat on an accented syllable discourages (but does not prevent) a beat from falling on a neighbour syllable.

Occasionally, what looks like a reversal straddles a split between speakers, but it is usually best not to try to realise it as one: in (67), for example, to read “<That is| a man’s| - [<sôn. / Have> I call’d| thee friend|?” or “I have| this charge|, † <tóo. / To> discharge| my life|?” is possible, but requires some tricky co-operation in timing to make it work. Since there is no chance of the Odd syllable influencing the Even one across the gap between speakers, it is perfectly acceptable to perform the relevant foot as an iamb:

(67)

Arcite: I am as worthy and as free a lover…
As any Palamon, or any living
<That is| a man’s| - son.

Palamon: Hâve| I call’d| thee friend|? (TNK 2.2.181)

Keeper: … My lord, for you
I have| this charge|, † too.

Palamon: To| discharge| my life|? (TNK 2.2.260)

§2.2.3: The Swap

Reversals apply to Odd-Even pairs of syllable-positions; a swap is a similar switching of properties between Even-Odd pairs of syllable-positions, so that the sequence w-S w-S becomes w-[w S]-S (which we write as w-[W S]-S, to reflect the fact that only certain kinds of syllable may form part of a swap – see below). Just as a reversal must be followed by an unswitched position (that is, a w in Odd), so must a swap (that is, an S in Even), thus preventing consecutive swaps. Swaps are referred to as belonging to the foot that initiates them, so there can be no fifth-foot swaps.
At *Hamlet* 1.2.32, for example, Shakespeare might have written straightforwardly “The lists|, and full| propor|tions all| are made|”; instead he used a template that swaps the expected prosodic values of positions eight and nine: “The lists|, and full| propor|tions [āre āll] made|”. Similarly:

(68) ►

A mote| it ìs| to troub|le [thē mind’s] éye|  
The per|fect ce|remo|ny [ōf love’s] ríte|  
I’ll woo| you like| a sol|dier, [āt ārms’] énd|,  
<And he| that got| it, sen|tenc’d – [ā yòng] mán|  
<Till by> some el|der mas|ters [ōf knòwn] hó|nour (Ham. 5.2.248)  
For I| am fal|ser [thān vôws] máde| in wine.  
<It is| more wor|thy [tō lèap] ín| ourselves|.7

In what follows I shall follow the convention already established of only marking stress where it deviates from the default expectation (i.e. “[the mind’s]” rather than “[thē mind’s]”).

The swap is somewhat rarer than the reversal (about 9% of lines in Shakespeare will include a swap).8 It is also more constrained in its occurrence: the metrical sequence [W s] can only be occupied by the prosodic sequences Ō-a (see §1.4.2) or O O: we could not have, for example, o-A (“The lists| and full| propor|tions [āre máde], Téd|”), or o-a (“The lists|, and full| propor|tions [Elāine] máde|”). Moreover, the two syllables of the swap must be separated by nothing more nor anything less than a word-break: a crack, for example, will split it into two normal feet (and encourage us to perform the crack as a break):

(69) ►

<1When I| be2hold| the 3vi|o1lét| # pàst 5prime|,  
<1After> a 2thou|sand 3vic|to4řés| # önce 7foil’d|,  
And 1beau|ty 2ma|king 3beau|ti4fūl| # òld 5rhyme|  

Note that in association with verbs, words that look like prepositions may in fact be fully stressed verbal particles or adverbs: compare “She looked up the road” (preposition), “She looked the road úp” ([in a directory]; [stressed] verbal particle), “She looked úp” ([stressed] adverb).

About 7% of lines in the *Sonnets* will contain a swap, for example, as opposed to 30% for a possible reversal. Comparable figures for Milton (*Paradise Lost*) are 5% and 25%, and for Pope (*Rape of the Lock*), 2.5% and 20%.
Note that without the crack between complement and object the rhythm of the last line would be subtly different: “And Shakespeare wrote some beautiful old rhymes”.

If the first of the two feet involved in a swap is reversible, we have an optional swap: we can, for example, say either “<If my dear love were but the child of state>” (Son. 124.1) or “If [my dear love were but the child of state]”, with obvious distinctions in emphasis. To represent both these potential lines in scanning such verses we include the signs for both:

(70)

<If [my dear love] were but the child of state>,

The source of this our watch, and [the chief head] (Ham. 1.1.106)

To bear our hearts in grief, and [our whole king] (Ham. 1.2.3)

<Thus much> the business is: we [have here] writ (Ham. 1.1.27)

<It was> about to speak when [the cock crew]. (Ham. 1.1.147)

A swap that begins in the first foot will necessarily always be optional, but in terms of naturalism and liveliness it will usually work better as a swap than as a reversal, with a beat on the subordinated stress (vain, deep, first):

(71)

For it is as the air, invulnerable,

<And [our vain] blows malicious mockery> (Ham. 1.1.146)

And all the clouds that lour’d upon our house

<In [the deep] som of the ocean buried> (R3 1.1.4)

… the King’s son, Ferdinand, …

<Was [the first] man that leapt; cried ‘Hell is empty, and all the devils are here.’> (Tp. 1.2.214)

There is, finally, a small class of swaps that is produced by a pair of unstressed syllables in Even-Odd positions where the second is accented:

(72) ►

<Say if> thou’dst rather hear it [from our] mouths,

Or from our masters? (Mac. 4.1.62)

<How can> I then be elder [than thou] art? (Son. 22.8)
<As I not for myself, but [for thěe] will>,
<And [for my] sake e'en so doth she abuse]( me,

§2.2.4: Performing Swaps

The most natural and effective performance of a swap will result in consecutive beats (“The perfect ceremony of love’s rite”; “A mote it s to trouble the mind’s eye”), but because the first of these falls on a syllable that is subordinated to the second, the effect is subtly different from that where the two beats are consecutive because of a reversal or a jolt (eg “<Mumbling> of wicked charms, <conjuring> the moon” [KL 2.1.39]). Whereas in a reversal the beat occurs a little earlier than expected, in a swap the first (subordinated) beat is momentarily delayed, because it is closely bound to the following word: the effect is that of a slightly deferred beat, a little like a syncopation in music. At the same time, the subordinated stress in the swap – the s-syllable or subordinated beat – will be slightly prolonged.

There is an alternative way of performing swaps: some traditional metrists feel that what I call swaps are simply successive iambic feet, so that instead of:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(73) } & 42 \\
\text{A mote it } & 5\text{is to trouble the mind’s eye} \\
\text{Farewell the } & 3\text{plumed troop and the big wars} \\
\text{And he that } & 3\text{got it, sentenced – a young man} \\
\text{For princes to } & 3\text{come view fair Por|ti5.} \\
\text{The perfect ceremony of love’s rite} & 5\text{lo}
\end{align*}
\]

we should (according to them) say:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(74) } & 43 \\
\text{A mote it } & 5\text{is to trouble thē mind’s eye} \\
\text{Farewell the } & 3\text{plumed troop and thē big wars} \\
\text{And he that } & 3\text{got it, sentenced – â young man}
\end{align*}
\]

9 According to Woods (1984, 5-8), for example, the foot boundary (a purely notional concept in any case) has some mysterious occult potency that prevents us from comparing syllabic prominence on either side of it: in “When to thē ses | siōns of | sweet si | lent thought|,” (Son. 30.1, her scansion), of is (it seems) metrically prominent and sweet isn’t, because we only compare within the foot: of with siōns, and sweet with si- (see also McAuley 1966, 23). This is magical thinking.
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For princes to come view fair Portia
The perfect ceremony of love’s rite.
To-morrow are let blood at Pomfret Castle

Such mechanical and unnatural readings are just possible, given that the weak syllables that are now to carry the beat are inhibited rather than fully dominated, but to allow them to do so they require an arbitrary and unmotivated accent. The greater regularity of (74) over (73) – and regularity is not, in any case, a virtue in itself – comes at a cost to both naturalness and prosodic liveliness. As with other performative choices, however, it is a matter of interpretive decision, and there is no practical reason why you should stick rigidly to one or the other method of reading swaps.

Because of the prominence that the swap lends to what would normally be a subordinate syllable, it is always worth checking to see whether that syllable might take a liberating accent. Horatio’s seemingly odd reference to “young Hamlet” (presumably they are roughly contemporary) makes more sense, for example, as a contrastive allusion to the old Hamlet whose ghost has just appeared to them:

(75)

Horatio: Let us impart what we have seen to-night
<<Un[to young] Ham[let; for, upon] my life>,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.  (Ham. 1.2.170)

The metrical variation is thus functioning as a kind of authorial direction to the actor, to at least consider the possibility of contextually motivated accent on the s-syllable. Further examples:

(76) ►

King Edward: Is Clarence dead? The order was revers’d.
Gloucester: But he, poor man, by [your first] or|der died,
... Some tardy cripple bore the countermand,  (R3 2.1.88)

Antonio: My ven|tures re| not [in one] bo|ttom trus|(ted,  (MV 1.1.42)

Jessica: And, Launcelot, soon at supper shalt thou see
Loren|zo, whô| is [thy new] mas|ter’s guest|.  (MV 2.3.6)

Perdita: ... With wisdom I might fear, my Doricles,
You woo’d| me [the false] way|.  
Florizel: I think you have
As little skill to fear as I have purpose (WT 4.4.151)

Lorenzo: I know the hand; in faith, 'tis a fair hand, (MV 2.4.12)

In the old age <black was> not counted fair (Son. 127.1)

Claudius: ... That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation [for some term]
To do obsequious sorrow. (Ham. 1.2.91)

Worcester: <For mine own part>, <I could be well content> (1H4 5.1.24)

The fugitive Prince Florizel, in danger of being compromised (by his poor retinue) in his pretence of being on a diplomatic mission, assures Leontes he has come

To execute the charge my father gave me
For visiting your Highness. [My best train]
I have from your Sicilian shores dismiss'd; (WT 5.1.163)

The frequency of swaps in Claudius’ first speech represents an invitation to the actor to underscore his smarmy over-emphatic manner with excessive accentuation (L. C. Knights speaks of the “unctuous verse rhythms” [1960, 41] in this passage):

Though yet of Hamlet [our dear brother’s death]
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and [our whole kingdom
To be] contracted [in one brow] of woe ...
With one auspicious [and one dropping eye] (Ham. 1.2.1-4, 11[F1])

Even in the absence of actual contrastive accent, a swap should encourage a performative exploration of semantically appropriate emphasis on the subordinated syllable, frequently an adjective:
If frosts| and fasts|, hard lod|ging [and thin] weeds|,  
<I do| arrest| thee, trai|tor, [of high] trea|(son;  
<Now, trust| me, ‘tis| an o|ffice [of great] worth|  
And ne|ver from| this pa|lace [of dim] night|  
The no|ble Pa|ris [and true] Ro|m’o dead|.

§2.2.5: The 28 Templates and the Tail, or ‘Feminine’ Ending

Simple arithmetic will show that given the rules of combination – every switch must be followed by an unswitched position – there are 28 possible templates, including the matrix (with no switches), 11 templates with one switch, 12 with two switches, and four with three:

**The 28 Templates:**

1. wS wS wS wS wS The matrix
2. Sw wS wS wS wS First reversal
3. wS Sw wS wS wS Second reversal
4. wS wS Sw wS wS Third reversal
5. wS wS wS Sw wS Fourth reversal
6. Sw wS Sw wS wS First and third reversal
7. Sw wS wS Sw wS First and fourth reversal
8. wS Sw wS Sw wS Second and fourth reversal
9. wW sS wS wS wS First swap
10. wS wW sS wS wS Second swap
11. wS wS wW sS wS Third swap
12. wS wS wS wW sS Fourth swap
13. wW sS wW sS wS First and third swap
14. wW sS wW sS wS First and fourth swap
15. wS wW sS wW sS Second and fourth swap
16. Sw wW sS wS wS First reversal and second swap
17. Sw wS wW sS wS First reversal and third swap
18. Sw wS wS wW sS First reversal and fourth swap
19. wS Sw wW sS wS Second reversal and third swap
20. wS Sw wS wW sS Second reversal and fourth swap
21. wS wS Sw wW sS Third reversal and fourth swap
22. wW sS Sw wS wS First swap and third reversal
23. wW sS wS Sw wS First swap and fourth reversal
24. wS wW sS Sw wS  Second swap and fourth reversal
25. Sw wS Sw wW sS  First and third reversals with fourth swap
26. Sw wW sS Sw wS  First and fourth reversals with second swap
27. wW sS wS wW sS  First and fourth swaps with third reversal
28. Sw wW sS wW sS  Second and fourth swaps with first reversal.

Verses with three switches are fairly rare, probably because they can be metrically hard to decode: the play’s New Arden editor comments on the “very awkward rhythm” of one example of Template 25 (“<Till we> perceiv’d| <both how| you [were wrong] led|,” AC 3.6.80), a verse that earlier editors frequently emended for metre.

Each of these 28 templates has a kind of shadow version with an extra weak position on the end, indicated here by a ‘(‘ or opening lunette after the final foot-marker:

(80)
Resem|bling sire|, and child|, and ha|ppy mo|(ther,
   (Son. 8.11)
By what|? By a|ny o|ther house|, or per|(son?
   (Tp. 1.2.42)

This may be called a tail (or a ‘double ending’; formerly, a ‘feminine ending’). Tails make a line a little less formal, and in broad terms their frequency tends to increase as Shakespeare’s career progresses, from fewer than 1% in LLL to over 20% in the last plays. Occasionally we will find a ‘long tail’, one with two weak syllables (also called a ‘triple ending’); it is usually possible to make this a sixth iambic foot, though Occam’s Razor suggests that we should perform a verse in pentameter as a pentameter where we can:

(81)
My Lord| of West|morelând|, and un|cle Ex|eter,
   (H5 2.2.70)
For what| is hĕ| they fo|llow? Tru|lly, gent|lemen,
   (R3 5.3.245)

An unambiguous alexandrine (see §6.1.2), by contrast, will end in a dominant, and have a syntactic cut after the third foot, producing a symmetrical pattern not possible in the pentameter:

---

10 The term has been abandoned because to modern ears it sounds sexist, although its origins are more innocent: it arose because in the classical scansion of French verse, feminine adjectives ending in <e> acquire an extra syllable – a final schwa – before a following consonant, so that the following line has ten syllables: Ni un grand homme, ni une grandë femme.
In Shakespeare’s late style, perhaps under the influence of John Fletcher (with whom he collaborated), a stressed syllable may find its way into the tail if the syllable that precedes it is stronger (i.e., accented):

(83)

<Rather> to show| a no|ble grace| to both| (parts) <Follow> us tō| the court|. Thou, churl|, for this| (time,  

In dramatic verse, a cut in the middle of the line can also take an extra weak syllable, a caesural tail [technical term: ‘feminine epic caesura’]:

(84)

<Then, if| be lose|, he makes| a swan|-like end|, <Fading> in mu|(sic. † <That the| compa|rison|  

The general effect of the tail is to impede the onward rush from line to line (or from part-line to part-line), and so tails are particularly appropriate to a meditative mood:

(85)

To be|, or nōt| to be|, <that is> the ques|tion:  

§2.3: Changing the Representation of the Pattern (Prosodic Variation)

The amount of metrical variation offered by the pentameter is restricted in obvious ways: simple arithmetic will show that (tails aside) in addition to the matrix we can derive eight templates with a single switch (a swap or a reversal), sixteen with two switches, and a further three with three switches.
Verses in this last category are rare and offer the reader and performer a bumpy ride (the New Arden editor notes the “very awkward rhythm” of the following):

(86)
<Till we> perceiv’d ‹both how› you [were wrong] led‖  

If we add a tail to each of these 28 templates, the total number of metrically distinct verse-shapes is only 56. Far greater, however, is the number of ways in which these templates can be realised in the prosodic material of the line.

The simplest way to realise a template is through ‘natural’ mappings, in which each beat or S-position is realised by a dominant, and each off-beat or w-position by a weak syllable:

(87)
<Hunting> he lov’d| but love| he laugh’d| to scorn|  
<Roses> have thorns|, and sil|ver foun|tains mud|, ...  
And loath|some can|ker lives| in swee|test bud|.  

Such fully natural verses are, however, less common than might be supposed, because the structure of English tends to discourage them.

§2.3.1: Weak Beats (beats realised by weak syllables)

One of the most common kinds of artificial mapping is the light mapping, or alignment of an independent unstressed (ie ‘O’) syllable with an S-position; in performance this produces a weak beat (a beat realised by a weak syllable):

(88)
<This was> the no|blest Ro|man ōf| them all|:  
His ten|der heir| might bear| his me|mory|:  
<Shall I> compare| thee tō| a su|mmer’s day|?  
Absent| thee frōm| fel|city| a while|,  
<Of the> defen|dant; ānd| thou hāst| incur’rd|  

For reasons to do with the structure of English – in particular its fondness for prepositional phrases (of them all, by succession, from felicity) – weak beats are surprisingly common: on average 65% of lines will include one. In the following passage, every line has at least one:
2. Pentameter and its Common Variations

§2.3.2: Performing Weak Beats

In a prose scene in *As You Like It* (4.1), Orlando (who has been hanging love-poems on the trees, much to Jaques’ disgust) enters with “Good day, and happiness, dear Rosalind!”, and Jaques responds grumpily with “Nay, then, God buy [goodbye to] you, an [if] you talk in blank verse”. But how does Jaques recognise Orlando’s utterance as pentameter? Its most likely performance in isolation would be with only three beats: 

► 47 “Good 1day, and 2happiness, dear 3Rosalind!” In order to speak it as “Gòod 1day], and 2ha|ppi3nˌəs], dèar 4Ro|sa5ˌlɪnd|!” Orlando must signal the beat-bearing status of -ness and -lînd, and the usual way to do this is to co-opt the process of Beat Addition discussed above (§1.5.2). What this means in practice is that he decelerates slightly before the unstressed beat-carrying syllable so that it occurs later than it would have in reading the line as prose, at the same time enunciating the vowel of the weak beat -ness with a little more clarity: somewhere between the schwa we would expect in prose (§1.1.1) and the full vowel we would expect if the syllable were fully stressed: the subliminal delay is no more than a signal. The speaker should not try to exaggerate the slowing down: no-one expects or wants sing-song regular timing from iambic pentameter. It is enough merely to suggest a deceleration: my own research on recorded performances suggests that actors will tend to utter feet with weak beats between five and 15 per cent more slowly than they do phonologically equivalent segments in prose.
§2.3.3: **Strong Offbeats (offbeats realised by stressed syllables)**

A **heavy mapping** – a subordinated stress or a-syllable in w-position – will produce a **strong offbeat** in the performed line. Heavy mappings are about half as common as light ones, averaging (very roughly) 0.3 per line. The following ponderous, rhetorically patterned line is atypically rich in them: “**Thoughts** black|, **hands** apt|, **drugs** fit|, and time| agree|(ing” (Ham. 3.2.255). Ordinary strong offbeats cause no problem in performance, because it is normal in speech to avoid placing beats on subordinated a-stresses.

Rarer, but more disruptive, is the super-strong offbeat, produced by a **super-heavy mapping** (dominant A-stress in w-position), as in the first two feet of this line: “**Words**, vows|, **gifts**, tears|, and love’s| full sa|cri|fice|,” (TC 1.2.282). Super-strong offbeats are unnatural: since they constitute a list (see §1.5.1), each of the first four syllables of this line ‘wants’ to be a beat, and to perform it as a pentameter we have to artificially subordinate syllables one and three – effectively by timing the line as though the first four syllables belonged to two noun phrases (eg **Heard** vows, **wëpt** tears). Superstrong offbeats can give a line a degree of weight and *gravitas*, as in “**Sin**, death|, and hell| have set| their marks| on him|” (R3 1.3.293), or “<Clarence> is come|, **false**, flee|ting, per|jur’d Cla|rence|,” (R3 1.4.55), or “[I . . . ] Do love|, **prize**, ho|nour yôu|, / <I am| a fool” (Tp. 3.1.73)

Strong offbeats are one way in which Shakespeare can govern tempo: they slow the line down because a stressed syllable demands more time than an unstressed one. Weak beats, however, do not speed the line up (indeed, they slow it down when they are the result of expansion: see §2.3.6), but they do make it more light-footed and agile, less ponderous. The opening lines of *MND*, for example, express Theseus’ ennui, his sense that time is dragging its feet as it moves towards the wedding, and this mood is reflected in the prevalence of (bolded) **strong offbeats** (1.66 per line, as against a typical 0.3) over (italicised) **weak beats** (0.83). Note that (as in line 5) a foot may contain both a strong offbeat and a weak beat if they are separated by a cut:

(90)  
<Now, **fair**| Hippo|lytä|, our nup|tial hour|  
<Dràws on| apace|. **Four** ha|ppy days| **bring** in|  
Ano|ther moon|; but, O|, methinks|, **however** slow|  
**This** old| **mòon** wanes|! She lin|gers mÿ| desires|,  

---

11 Note that *on* and *in* in this line are (fully stressed) verbal particles, not stressless prepositions.
<Like to a step>-dàme, ôr a do[wagër],
Lòng wi[th‘ring out] a young[ mâns re]venüe].  (MND 1.1.1-6)

In addition to their actual effect on the line, this density of strong offbeats can be seen as constituting a sort of embedded instruction to the actor to slow down the tempo here. Hippolyta manages to cheer him up with her first speech, however, and his next is much lighter and quicker in movement, with a much lower 0.25 **strong offbeats** per line but an above-average 1.37 **weak beats**:

(91) ► 49
<Stir up thë Athe[n‘an youth] to me[rëmënts],
Awake the pert[ and nim]ble spir[ of mirth],
Tûrn Me[lancho]ly forth[ to fu]nerâls;
The pale[ comp]ion [is] not for[ our pomp].
Hippo[lytâl], I woo’d thee with[ my sword],
And won th[ love] <doing> thee in[jurës];
<But I will wed thee in] anoth[er key],

With pomp[, with tril]umph, ând[ with re]vel[ling].  (MND 1.1.12-19)

§2.3.4: **Harsh Mapping (beat realised by subordinate stress)**

A harsh mapping is the alignment of a subordinate or a-syllable with an S-position in the verse (see §1.4.1 for the conditions that govern subordination); because subordinate stresses don’t carry beats in ordinary speech the resultant line will be unmetrical unless it is recuperated in performance (by hesitation, prolongation, or motivated accent), which generally sounds strained and awkward, and while it is favoured by rough-textured poets like Donne and Browning, is avoided altogether in strict neo-classical verse. It can hardly be a coincidence that in the line in which he protests about the ‘forced’ and artificial nature of ‘mincing poesy’, Hotspur should employ a harsh mapping: “<‘Tis like| the forc‘d| + <gait of> a shuff|ling nag|” (1H4 3.1.133).

A harsh mapping is thus a feature of the verse which must be recuperated in performing the line if it is not to sound unmetrical. I have discussed the performance of harsh mappings above in the section on medial reversals (§2.2.2), because they are most often caused by such reversals. As I point out there, in Brutus’ self-exculpatory “<We shall| be càll’d| + <purgers>, † not mur|derës” (JC 2.1.180) hesitating at the flaw can suggest his searching for
a convincing euphemism, but if we don’t hesitate, and prolong call’d instead, the line sounds awkward and evasive, as though Brutus himself doesn’t believe what he’s saying. As an actor, you pays your money and you takes your choice. Camillo’s attempt to broach the question of Leontes’ homicidal paranoia with Polixines is equally awkward:

(92)

There is a sickness
Which pûts|#<some of> us în| distem|per; bût|
I cannot name the disease; and it is caught
Of you that yet are well. (WT 1.2.385)

Prolonging the subordinated syllable gives it a degree of performative emphasis which (not being accent) is not necessarily contrastive or focal; incantatory speeches in MND favour this device:

(93)►

►50

<Fall in> the frësh| - <lap of> the crim|son rose|, (MND 2.1.108)
<Flying> between| the cóld| - <moon and> the earth|, (MND 2.1.156)
<Quench’d in> the châste| - <beams of> the wat’ry moon|, (MND 2.1.162)

Note that for the purposes of the metre it is only the stress adjacent to the dominant that is subordinated: in a phrase like old # [black ram] only black is subordinate, so that such a phrase scans naturally in Even-Odd-Even position, as predicted by the Alternating Stress Rule (§1.2.3), with no harsh mapping:

(94)

E’n now|, nôw, ve|ry now|, an old| blàck ram|
My ve|ry no|ble ând| approv’d| good mas|(ters, (Otb. 1.1.89)

In performing iambic pentameter, however, there is a tendency to generalise the Alternating Stress Rule to just about any sequence of three majors in Even-Odd-Even, though this can be uncomfortable with ‘left-branching’ sequences like góod| friends, † hark| and may generate odd implications in some cases: if, for example, we say “It would control my dam’s god, \ Setebos,” we seem to be implying the existence of some other god as background information, which makes no sense in the context:
2. Pentameter and its Common Variations

What foul play had we, that we came from thence? (Tp. 1.2.60)

... His art is of such power,

What harmon is this? My good friends, hark! (Tp. 3.3.18)

The alternative strategy is to treat such sequences as harsh mappings to be recuperated.

§2.3.5: Awkward Mapping (beat realised by influenced syllable)

By far the rarest prosodic variation in Shakespeare (and even rarer outside his work) is the awkward mapping, in which a beat is realised on an ‘influenced’ syllable – that is, a weak syllable that is protected from a preceding dominant only by a crack. The most usual occurrence is on a preposition in position 4, following a monosyllabic verb:

As its name suggests, it feels awkward and forced both in performance and in perception, since the beat is most naturally attracted to the syllable exerting the influence (in the BBC LLL the King puts a beat on treads in the last line of (96), turning it into a four-beat anapestic romp), and it sometimes reflects a felt awkwardness in the speaker, as in the case of Macbeth’s embarrassed apology for his alarming behaviour at the feast, or Posthumus’ reluctant inquiry about Iachimo’s trophy-bracelet:

Macbeth: Do not muse at me, [my most] worthy friends, (Mac. 3.4.84)

Posthumus: Once more let me behold it. Is it that

Which I left with her?

Iachimo: Sir, (I thank her) that. (Cym. 2.4.100)
Some verses that look as though they contain awkward mappings may be redeemed by contextually appropriate accent (this is always worth exploring):

(98) ►₃₃

<They may> vex us| with shot| or with| assault| (1H6 1.4.13)

Imogen: <How should> I b| ē| reveng’d|?
Iachimo: Should he> make me|

Live, like Diana’s priest, betwixt cold sheets,
While he is vaulting variable ramps … ? (Cym. 1.6.132)

Cordelia: That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

<Half my> love with| him, half| my care| and du|(ty. (KL 1.1.102)

Othello: Put out the light, and then put out the light:

<If I> quench thee|, thou fla|mig mi|str|,
I can again thy former light restore,
<Should I> repent me; [but once] put| out thy| (light, … [to Desd.] (Oth. 5.2.8)

In the following example, an initial consideration would suggest “<She may> help you| to ma|ny fair| prefer|(ments”, in itself a perfectly adequate reading of the line, but a consideration of the context reveals a sarcastic playing with the word may. Gloucester’s original may” is the usual unstressed form of the auxiliary, meaning “I don’t know” (the ‘epistemic’ use, as in “She may go to the ball – who knows?”) but Rivers’s may” is accented (by default, being the stressed form used when the main verb is ellipted), and counters with the ‘deontic’ use (meaning “She is entitled to deny it (since it is untrue)” as in “She may go to the ball: I permit it”). Gloucester echoes this mockingly with a deliberately accented may” that asserts (deontically) that she has the power to tell lies because she is the queen of England:

(99) ►₄₄

Gloucester: You [Queen Elizabeth] may” deny that you were not the mean
Of my Lord Hastings’ late imprisonment.
Rivers: She máy," my lord; for –
Gloucester: She máy," Lord Rivers? Why, who knows not so?
She may” do more, sir, than denying that:
She may\textup{\textasciitilde} help you\textup{\textasciitilde} to many fair \begin{description}
\item[preferences]
\end{description}
And then deny her aiding hand therein, 

\\textup{\textasciitilde}(R3 1.3.90-96)\textup{\textasciitilde}  

\section*{§2.3.6: Contraction and Expansion of Words in Performance}

When the curate Nathaniel recites a sonnet in alexandrines (six-foot iambic lines) found in a letter, the schoolmaster Holofernes reprimands him: “You find not the apostrophus, and so miss the accent; let me supervise the canzonet [look over the poem].” \textit{(LLL 4.2.119)}. The lines that provoke this comment are the final couplet:

\textit{(100)}

\begin{quote}
Cele\textasciitilde{t}al as thou art, † O, pardon love this wrong,
That sings heaven\textasciitilde{s} praise with such an earthly tongue. \textit{(LLL 4.2.117-8)}
\end{quote}

The problem here is that while the first thirteen lines are alexandrines, the last comes out in Nathaniel’s reading as a pentameter. ‘Apostrophus’ was a contemporary word for contraction,\textsuperscript{12} and ‘accent’ effectively meant both ‘major stress’ and ‘beat’: presumably Nathaniel has misread the alexandrine “That sing\textasciitilde{eth} heaven\textasciitilde{s} praise † with such an earthly tongue” by contracting \textasciitilde{singeth} to \textasciitilde{sings} and \textasciitilde{heaven\textasciitilde{s}} to \textasciitilde{heaven\textasciitilde{n}s}, thus missing the beat on monosyllabic \textasciitilde{heaven\textasciitilde{n}s}, now subordinated in stress to \textasciitilde{praise}; Holofernes, having heard the mis-scansion, wishes to ‘supervise’ or look over the poem to see where Nathaniel’s contractions went wrong.

Where a word is contracted the half-vowel remains psychologically present to the reader or audience as a kind of ripple in the prosody, even if it is completely eliminated in phonetic terms; this is because they know the underlying shape of the word. The effect of this is a slight local acceleration of tempo, as dictated by regular timing (§1.5): put simply, the more syllables there are between beats, the faster the tempo.

The essential performance point about half-vowels (and restorables) is that where they count in the metre they should be pronounced lightly, and usually with a \textit{schwa} or \textit{/\textipa{i}/}; the idea is to make mapped half-vowels and restorables as unobtrusive in performance as possible. There are one or two exceptions to this

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\textsuperscript{12}“Apostrophus is the ejecting of a letter or a syllab out of one word or out betuene tuae, and is always marked above the lyne, as it wer a comma, thus.” from CAP. 10 of Alexander Hume’s c1620 MS \textit{Of the Orthographie and Congruitie of the Britan Tongue; A Treates, noe shorter then necessarie, for the Schooles}, ed. Henry B. Wheatley for the Early English Text Society (London: Trübner & Co., 1865).
rule, however; because the expanded forms are usually more formal and elevated, their choice is sometimes motivated by stylistic considerations, and their presence may indicate the need for a more stately or exaggerated performance, as in the case of the Prince of Morocco’s grandiloquent opening “Mislike| me nôt| for mŷ| comple|xïŏn|” (MV 2.1.1), where the actor should not just give the word *complexion* the four-syllabled enunciation demanded by the metre, but extend this formal and exotically over-precise performance to the whole passage (compare Portia’s dismissive echo of the word, colloquially contracted: “[Lĕt all| of hîs| comple|x’ŏn choose| me so].” (MV 2.7.79). Similarly, a prissy trisyllabic expansion of *patience* is well suited to Iago’s mock-sententious “How poor| are thĕy| that have| not pa|tïĕncë!” (Oth. 2.3.370). The expansion of words in -tion, -sion and so on {technically called ‘depalatalisation’} was normal in Chaucer’s speech but already a purely literary convention for Milton, and so must have had for Shakespeare (as for us) an archaic and formal ring; it is significant, therefore, that it occurs so frequently in the scene in which Buckingham and Catesby are sanctimoniously trying to represent Gloucester to the citizens of London as ‘holy and devout’:

(101)

**Catesby:** He is *within, with two right reverend fathers,*

Divine|ly bent| to me|ditâ|tion;  

(R3 3.7.62)

**Buckingham:** He is *not lolling on a lewd day-bed,*

<But on| his knees| at me|ditâ|tion;  

(R3 3.7.73)

**Buckingham:** So sweet| is zeal|ous con|templâ|tion.

(R3 3.7.94)

**Buckingham:** And par|don ŭs| the in|terrup|tion|

*Of thy devotion and right Christian zeal.*  

(R3 3.7.102)

Contracted forms speed up the line. The contraction of *dangerous* by Claudius in the following is appropriate to the urgency of what he is saying:

(102)

**Claudius:** *Grating so harshly all his days of quiet*

With tur|bulent| and dan|gerous lu|nacy?  

(Ham. 3.1.4)

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13 Milton uses depalatalisation frequently in the self-consciously ‘Elizabethan’ *Comus* but hardly at all in the deliberately modern verse of *Paradise Lost.*
Claudius: How dangrous is it thət this man gəes loose!  

(Ham. 4.3.2)

By contrast, the slower and more deliberate movement of expansion suits both Hamlet’s quiet menace and Caesar’s pomposity:

(103)

Hamlet: I prithee take thy fingers from my throat;
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I in me something dangerous,

(Ham. 5.1.262)

Caesar: Danger knows full well
That Cæsar is more dangerous than hĕ.

(JC 2.2.45)

Contraction is the default expectation: of the 34 pentameter occurrences of difference in Shakespeare, for example, 25 (73%) are contracted, and of the 88 occurrences of dangerous 52 (59%) are contracted, so that expansion, with its slower tempo, is the marked option. Expansion suits the gravity of a judge addressing counsel in a capital case; the solemnity of an ambassador delivering a grim warning; and the lascivious dwelling of an adulteress on the ‘difference’ between her husband and her lover:

(104)

Duke: <Are you| acquainted with| the difference|
That holds this present question in the court?  

(MV 4.1.171)

Exeter: <And, be| assured, you’ll find| a difference,
As we his subjects have in wonder found,

(H5 2.4.134)

Goneril: ^O,| the difference| of man| and man|!
To thee a woman’s services are due; / A fool usurps my bed.  

(KL 4.2.26)14

§2.4: Other Variations in Rhythm

Not all variations in rhythm are produced by metrical or prosodic variation.

14 The caret (^) indicates a silent offbeat (see §1.5.3 and Ch. 4) which here encourages a lascivious dwelling on the exclamatory ‘O’.
§2.4.1: Phrasing

An important influence on the rhythm (though not on the metre) of the line is word- and phrase-structure. Where a weak syllable follows a dominant in the word or phrase pattern (A-o), we call it a ‘falling’ measure, which I shall indicate here by bolding: **singing, busy, eat it**; the converse pattern o-A is a ‘rising’ measure (here italicised): **áleárt, dépéánd, a lífe**. The following verses are metrically identical (ten syllables, every other syllable dominant) but rhythmically the pairs are quite distinct, because (105) has predominantly rising measures and (106) predominantly falling ones.

(105)

```
They know| your grace| bath cause| and means| and might|
And so| espous’d| to death|, with blood| he seal’d|
```

(H5 1.2.127)  
(H5 4.6.26)

(106)

```
The si|ning ma|sons bui|ding roofs| of gold|,
With bu|sy ha|mmers clo|sing ri|vets up|,
```

(H5 1.2.198)  
(H5 4.0.13)

For technical reasons falling rhythms have a slightly faster tempo than rising ones,\(^{15}\) and it is no coincidence that both lines of (106) describe scenes of busy activity. Such modulation of phrasing is an important source of rhythmic variety in the pentameter.

§2.4.2: Syllabification

Syllabification is another important component of line structure. A monosyllabic line moves more slowly than a polysyllabic one, which is why Othello’s solemn invocation before the murder of Desdemona is largely monosyllabic (polysyllables in bold):

(107)

```
<It is| the cause|, <it is| the cause|, my soul|.
<Let me> not name| it t| you, [you chaste] stars|:
<It is| the cause|, <Yet I’ll> not shed| her blood|,
Nor scar| that whi|ter skin| of hers| than snow|
And smooth| as mo|numen|tal a|labas|ter.
```

(Oth. 5.2.1-5)

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\(^{15}\) For an explanation of this timing phenomenon see Couper-Kuhlen (1986, 59).
The predominance of monosyllables in the first four lines gives that last polysyllabic phrase a kind of monumental solidity (ironically emphasising by contrast Desdemona’s soft vulnerability). A famous use of contrastive syllabicity is the following, where the word ‘seas’ is overwhelmed by the polysyllables that surround it, hyperbolically suggesting the enormity of Macbeth’s crime:

(108)

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The mul[titud|inous seas|] incar[nadine],
Making the green one red.  

(Mac. 2.2.73)

§2.4.3:  Prosodic Figures: The Golden Line: o A o O o A o O o A

A prosodic figure is a prosodic sequence that not only enables a metrical line but is identifiable as a patterned artefact in its own right. For example, the alternation of strong and weak beats throughout a line in the pattern o A o O o A o O o A seems to produce a peculiarly even, ordered and tranquil rhythm, perhaps because the resultant lines have a kind of double order: the three equidistant peaks of major stress superimposed upon the five beats of the pentameter. The rhythmical doubleness can be seen very clearly in a famous golden line with double tail by an Elizabethan poet, which can be read as both iambic pentameter and paeanic trimeter: “[Ó wea|risõme|] [condi|tion ōf|] [huma|nitõ].”16 In the following examples the golden line is used to suggest simplicity and serenity:17

(109) ► 55

The qua[litõ] of mer|cy ţs| not strain’d|,
It fa[ded ţn|] the cro|wing ţf| the cock|.  

(MV 4.1.184)  

(Ham. 1.1.157)

16 Fulke Greville, Baron Brooke (1554–1628), first verse of ‘Chorus Sacerdotum’ from The Tragedy of Mustapha (London: [J. Windet] for N. Butler, 1609). A ‘paeon’ has three offbeats between each pair of beats, as in the patter songs of W. S. Gilbert (“I am the very model of a modern major general”) or the poems of Banjo Patterson (“There was movement at the station, for the word had passed a round”).

17 If the balanced line (§2.4.4) is a favourite of Pope’s, the golden line is typical of Wordsworth in his more serene moods: in ‘Tintern Abbey’ alone we find: “The landscape with the quiet of the sky.”, “An appetite; a feeling and a love.”, “A presence that disturbs me with the joy”, “A motion and a spirit, that impels”, “A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And mountains; and of all that we behold”, “In nature and the language of the sense.”. It is perhaps worth noting that the Wordsworthian last line of Wilfred Owen’s fine poem ‘Insensibility’ is a golden line: “The eternal reciprocity of tears.”
My boun|ty ĭs| as bound|less ās| the sea|,  \( (RJ\ 2.2.133) \)
And simp|ler thān| the in|fancŷ| of truth|.  \( (TC\ 3.2.170) \)

In (110) the golden line that refers to heaven is immediately followed by a reference to “this harsh world” in a clotted, retarded line with a swap, a harsh mapping and a super-strong offbeat:

(110)
Absent| thee frŏm| felic|it| a while|,
<And [in this] hàrsh| wŏrld draw| thy breath| in pain|,
\( To tell my story.\)  \( (Ham.\ 5.2.346-8) \)

§2.4.4:  Prosodic Figures: The Balanced Line: o A o A o O o A o A

If the mapping of beats in the golden line can be represented as AOAOA, in the balanced line it is AAOAA, with two pairs of strong beats flanking a weak centre. It is a form that lends itself to the expression of antithesis and was very popular with Augustan poets such as Pope (“A li|ttle lear|ning ĭs| a dang|erous thing!” \[Ess. Crit. 215\], “The feast| of rea|son ānd| the flow| of soul|” \[Imit. Hor. 1.1.128\]). Balanced lines are frequent in Sonnet 129, a poem full of balancing rhetorical figures such as chiasmus and antithesis, whose cumulative effect is to suggest the dehumanising mechanical nature of lust:

(111)
Thē expens|e| of spi|rit ĭn| a waste| of shame|
Is lust| in ac|tion, ānd| till ac|tion, lust| …
Enjoy’d| no soo|ner būt| despi|sēd straight|,
Past rea|son hun|ted, ānd| no soo|ner had|,
Past rea|son ha|ted ās| a swa|llow’d bait|,  \( (Son.\ 129) \)

Balanced lines (with retarding tails) are also suited to the solemn antiphonal lament of the queens in Richard III:

(112)
I had| an Ed|ward, tĭll| a Ri|chard kill’d|( him;
I had| a Ha|rry, tĭll| a Ri|chard kill’d|( him:
Thou hadst| an Ed|ward, tĭll| a Ri|chard kill’d|( him;
Thou hadst| a Ri|chard, tĭll| a Ri|chard kill’d|( him.  \( (R3\ 4.4.40-3) \)
3. Pauses, Breaks and Transitions

Gloucester: Come, cousin, canst thou quake and change thy colour,
Murder thy breath in middle of a word,
And then again begin, and stop again,
As if thou were distraught and mad with terror?

(Richard III, 3.5.1-4)

§3.1: Pauses and Short Lines

Pace Gloucester, it is a mistake to try to deliver Shakespeare’s verse with a lot of Pinteresque pausing: it “kill[s] the pace” (Gielgud 1989, 100). “To put in pauses and breaks – In sooth (big pause) I know not WHY (hesitation) I am so (pause) SAD – ruins the form, even if it makes the actor feel modern and colloquial” (Hall 2003, 35); it “turns [the verse] into a jolting ride and makes it harder to follow, besides robbing it of its dynamic and emotive power” (Bell 2011, 92). Moreover, as Ian McKellen remarks, “the speeches are made up of a series of logical links. It disturbs this forward movement if the actor does too many ‘naturalistic’ pauses in the middle of the lines. … the natural place to pause (but then only when really necessary for effect) is usually at the end of the blank verse line, even if the end of the sentence occurs in the middle of the line” (McKellen 1996, 35). Moreover, if pauses are rare and thus not expected within the line, when they are made they can have a powerful effect: “When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her – [pause] though I know she lies” (Son. 138 1-2).

A ‘short line’ is any non-pentameter in the blank verse with fewer than ten available syllables (all syllables, half or full, up to and including the last independent, are ‘available’); a short line with fewer than six is a ‘fragment’. As many writers have observed, a short line is Shakespeare’s way of cueing a
pause (though it would be foolish to try to measure that pause by the number of supposedly ‘missing’ feet in the manner of Sicherman (1984)). Thus Marullus timorously hesitates before defying Caesar:

(113)

Flavius: … Disrobe the images / If you do find them deck’d with ceremonies.
Marullus: May we do so?

You know it is the feast of Lupercal. (JC 1.1.66)

An uncomfortable pause follows the messenger’s trimeter estimate of Octavia’s age:

(114) ►

Messenger: She was a widow –


Messenger: <And I| do think| she’s thir|ty. 

Cleopatra: Bear’st thou her face in mind? Is’t long or round? (AC 3.3.30)

Medial short lines (those within speeches), because of their intrusiveness and relative rarity, can have a powerfully disruptive effect. The Sergeant in Macbeth 1.2 has two fragments; the first is a deliberate rhetorical device on his part to introduce a slightly teasing suspense into the report of the combat between Macbeth and Macdonwald, while the second interrupts his faintly absurd rhetorical excesses with a typically Shakespearean intrusion of reality, giving the actor the opportunity to suggest that the Sergeant has been overpowered by his wounds:

(115)

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name), …

(Like Valour’s minion) carv’d out his passage
Till he fac’d the slave;

Which ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,

Till he unseam’d him from the nave to th’ chops, (Mac. 1.2.20)

Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,

Or memorise another Golgotha,

I cannot tell –

But I am faint, my gashes cry for help. (Mac. 1.2.41)
The Sergeant uses an initial fragment for the same teasing introduction of suspense:

(116)

DUNCAN: Dismay’d not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

SERGEANT: Yes,  

As sparrows eagles, or the bare the lion.  \[Mac. 1.2.35\]

A famous medial fragment in Hamlet enacts the pause of the revenger Pyrrhus, a tableau in which Hamlet finds a peculiar resonance:

(117)

So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,  
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,  
Did nothing.  
But as we often see, against some storm, … \[Ham. 2.2.483\]

Earlier in the play, medial fragments represent the ghost’s stubborn silence in the face of Horatio’s questioning:

(118)

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
Speak to me.  
If there be any good thing to be done  
That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,  
Speak to me.  
If thou art privy to thy country’s fate  
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,  
O, speak! \[Ham. 1.1.128-35\]

Iago gives us a classic ‘thinking’ pause:

(119)

How, how? –Let’s see:  
After some time, to abuse Othello’s ear …  
The Moor is of a free and open nature, …  
And will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are.
I have’t. It is engender’d. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light.  \hspace{1cm} (Oth. 1.3.402)

In the last scene of *The Tempest* a medial fragment establishes a pause for contemplation as Prospero surveys the victims of his magic:

\[(120)\]

\textbf{N}	exit{ow useless, boil’d within thy skull! There stand,}
For you are spell-stopp’d.
\textit{Holy Gonzalo, honourable man,}\hspace{1cm} (Tp. 5.1.62)

Sometimes a short line indicates an interruption (see also (99) and (138)):

\[(121)\]

\textbf{B}ernardo: \textit{Last night of all, / … Marcellus and myself;}

\textit{The bell| then bea|ting one| – [Enter Ghost].}
\textbf{M}arcellus: \textit{Peace! break thee off! Look where it comes again!} \hspace{1cm} (Ham. 1.1.39)

A fragment may also herald and provide space for a significant piece of stage business, as in the case of Octavius’s drawing his sword or Othello’s ceremonial renunciation of love:

\[(122)\]

\textbf{O}ctavius: \textit{The proof of it will turn to redder drops.}

\textit{Look,}
\textit{I draw a sword against conspirators;} \hspace{1cm} (JC 5.1.50)

\textbf{O}thello: \textit{All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.}
\textit{’Tis gone.}
\textit{Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!} \hspace{1cm} (Oth. 3.3.446)

Initial fragments can sometimes have a vocative function, where the speaker (having something important to say) establishes the addressee, attracts his or her attention and pauses to secure it:

\[(123)\]

\textbf{H}elena: \textit{Gentlemen,}
\textit{Heav’n hath through me restor’d the King to health.} \hspace{1cm} (AW 2.3.63)
Pisanio: Lady,

*The gods throw stones of sulphur on me, if…*  
(*Cym. 5.6.240*)

Poet: Sir,

*I have upon a high and pleasant hill …*  
(*Tim. 1.1.62*)

York: Sirrah,

*Get thee to Plashy, to my sister Gloucester;*  
(*R2 2.2.89*)

King Richard: Ratcliff,

*About the mid of night come to my tent*  
(*R3 5.3.76*)

Abbot: My Lord,

*Before I freely speak my mind herein,*  
(*R2 4.1.326*)

Pericles: Great king,

*Few love to hear the sins they love to act;*  
(*Per. 1.1.91*)

Most trimeters, on the other hand, as Fredson Bowers (1980) has shown, are speech-final, and they tell the next speaker not to pick up the cue, not to respond quickly. In the following example, we can see Shylock’s declining to complete Antonio’s proffered part-line as a refusal to engage with him, to “hear [him] speak”:

(124)

**Antonio:** I pray thee, hear me speak.

**Shylock:** I’ll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak:  
(*MV 3.3.11-12*)

A scene-final trimeter can also serve as a kind of concluding punctuation mark (with or without a rhyming couplet):

(125)

**Hamlet:** *The time is out of joint – O curséd spite,*  

That ever I was born to set it right!

Náy, come|, let’s go| toge|ther.  
(*Ham. 1.5.188-90*)

**Fortinbras:** *Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this*  

Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.

<Go bid| the sol|diers shoot|.  
(*Ham. 5.2.401-3*)
Prospero: … Thou shalt be as free / As mountains winds; but then exactly do
All points of my command.

Ariel: To th’ syllable.

Prospero: Come, fo|llow: speak| not för|( him. [exeunt] (Tp. 1.2.499-502)

§3.1.1: Mid-line Break (‘Caesura’)

A medial break – one within a line – is traditionally known as a caesura (Latin: ‘cutting’); it rarely represents an actual pause. Cicele Berry refers to the normal caesura as “a poise on a word – ie the word holds and lifts for a fraction of a second before it plunges into the second half of the line” (1993, 58). The caesura is not a feature of the metre: there may be none, or one, or many in any given line, and they may, but need not, be marked by punctuation:

(126) ►

Titania: <Out of> this wood| † <do not| desire| to go|:
  <Thou shalt| remain|( hère, † <whether> thou wilt| or no|. (MND 3.1.152-3)

The caesura in the first line of Titania’s splendidly imperious command is a cut produced by the moving (or ‘fronting’) of the adverbial phrase “out of this wood” from its default position at the end of the clause (phrases that are moved in this way carry their terminal boundaries with them): compare the flatter but more natural version “Do not desire to go out of this wood”, in which the caesura has disappeared (the earliest texts place a helpful but ungrammatical comma at the caesura: “Out of this wood, do not desire to goe”).

We should distinguish two kinds of caesura in English: the ordinary connective caesura or joint (||), and the interruptive caesura or fracture (\) that temporarily suspends the forward pressure of sense and grammar, generally coinciding with the ends of questions and exclamations and the edges of parentheticals (roughly, bits that could go in brackets or between dashes). Note that when such fractured junctures occur at line-ends they have the opposite effect, reinforcing metre rather than disrupting it. The following two passages, separated by only sixty lines, show two very different Angelos – the first, with just one fracture, calmly and confidently expounding the law; the second, with a dozen of them, agitatedly examining his dissolving sense of selfhood:

(127) ►

Angelo: The law hath not been dead, || though it hath slept.
  Those many had not dar’d to do that evil
If the first that did th' edict infringe
Had answer'd for his deed. || Now 'tis awake,
Takes note of what is done, || and like a prophet,
Looks in a glass that shows what future evils,
Either now || or by remissness new conceiv'd,
And so in progress to be hatch'd and born,
Are now to have no successive degrees,
But ere they live to end.

**Isabella:** Yet show some pity.

**Angelo:** I show it most of all when I show justice;
   For then I pity those I do not know,
   Which a dismiss'd offence would after gall,
   And do him right that, \answer'ring one foul wrong,
   Lives not to act ano|(ther. || Be satisfied;
   Your brother dies to-morrow; || be content. (MM 2.2.90-105)

**Angelo:** What's this, \what's this? \Is this her fault, or mine?
   The tempter or the tempted, who sins most? \Ha?
   Not she; || nor doth she tempt; || but it is I
   That, \lying by the violet in the sun,
   Do as the carrion does, || not as the flow'r,
   Corrupt with virtuous season. || Can it be
   That modesty may more betray our sense
   Than woman's lightness? \Ha\ning waste ground enough,
   Shall we desire to raze the sanctu\ry,
   And pitch our evils there? \O fie, \fie, \fie!
   What dost thou – \or what art thou – \Angelo?
   Dost thou desire her fou\ly for those things
   That make her good? \O, let her brother live!
   Thieves for their robb\ry have authority
   When judges steal themselves. || What, \I love her,
   That I desire to hear her speak again?
   And feast upon her eyes? \What is't I dream on? (MM 2.2.162-78)
It will be noticed that where fractures disrupt the metrical flow of the line and render the verse more colloquial and naturalistic, joints tend to confirm and emphasise its metrical organisation.

Since the occurrence and positioning of caesurae are to some extent optional, the question of whether any given syntactic cut should be treated as a caesura is (outside the obvious cases) partly a matter of interpretation and judgment in the performance of the verse. The placement of caesurae is of course limited by syntax and sense (we couldn’t, for example, read “To be or not || to be, that is the question”), but it is not wholly determined by it, any more than is our choice of where to pause in ordinary speech.

As an exercise, the reader is invited to mark up the joints and fractures in an equivalent pair: calm Prospero (Tp. 4.1.146-63) vs. agitated Prospero (Tp. 1.2.66-87).

§3.1.2: Final Pause: Endstopping and Running On

Somewhere between the extremes of plonking (§1.3.3) and reading verse as rhythmic prose is the performance that recognises that each line is both a discrete entity and at the same time linked in different ways to what precedes and follows it: that one line flows into the next with different degrees of pressure, speed and urgency. Traditionally verses are termed ‘endstopped’ if the line-ending coincides with a cut, and ‘run-on’ or ‘enjambed’ if it doesn’t. An endstopped verse is ‘single-moulded’ if that clause or phrase is co-extensive with the line itself: verse 3 of (130) is single-moulded, for example, because it forms a complete predicate, whereas verse 6 doesn’t because it lacks the direct object (which itself constitutes the single-moulded verse 7).

But the situation is more complex than this binary distinction would suggest. The flow from one line into the next depends on a number of variables, the first of them being the degree of terminal closure. There are five kinds of terminal closure for verses; only the first three occur in Shakespeare. If the verse ends in a cut (§1.3.2), it has maximal or Type 1 closure; if it ends in a crack, it has Type 2 closure; if it ends in a flaw, it has Type 3 closure. Other possibilities, not found in Shakespeare, include ending in a join (a mere word-juncture, Type 4) and ending inside a word (Type 5). An example of Type 4 closure would be Hopkins’s “Because| the Ho|ly Ghost| <over> the bent| / World broods| with warm| <breast and> with ah|! bright wings|.” (“God’s Grandeur”); a Type 5 would be Marilyn Hacker’s “<heard from>, unrul|ied, coup|led with|

---

1 In an early play like CE, the distribution is 84% Type 1, 15.8% Type 2, 0.2% Type 3. At the end of Shakespeare’s career, in the much more fluid versification of Tp., the figures are very different: 45% Type 1, 46% Type 2, 9% Type 3.
astound-ing speed with some-body whose name (not gen-der)” (Hacker 1995, 148). These two types do not produce enjambment, because enjambment is a tension between closure and the pressure to complete the syntax, and so it requires the end of the line to coincide with a syntactic break of some sort. Examples of the three types of closure:

(129) ◄ 60
If by your art, my dearest father, you have + Type 3
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. † Type 1
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch, † Type 1
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin’s cheek, † Type 1
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered # Type 2
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel, † Type 1
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her, † Type 1
Dash’d all to pieces. O, the cry did knock # Type 2
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish’d. † Type 1

(Tp. 1.2.1-9)

It is sometimes assumed that endstopped lines have no onward momentum, but in fact where they include an ‘impetus marker’, bolded in the scansion – a subordinating conjunction, a nominative pronoun with no verb attached, or a transitive verb with no object – the line will have a degree of onward semantic pressure, indicated by a small arrow:

(130) ◄ 61
[A league from Epidamnum had we sail’d], †
Before [the always-wind-obeying deep] # ⇒ 2
[Gave any tragic instance of our harm]; †
But [longer did we not retain much hope]; † 4
For [what obscured light the heavens did grant] # ⇒
Did but convey [unto our fearful minds] # ⇒ 6
[A doubtful warrant of immediate death], †
[Which though myself would gladly have embrac’d], 8
Yet [the incessant weepings of my wife], † ⇒
[Weeping before for what she saw must come], † 10
And [piteous plainings of the pretty babes], †

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That mourn’d for fashion, [ign’rant what to fear], † 12
[Forc’d me to seek delays for them and me]. † (CE 1.1.62-74)

As Peter Hall says, “It is unfortunate that … it should be known as endstopping, because [in performance] there should, wherever possible, be no stop. It is rather a going-on point, an energetic hesitation that summons up the strength to proceed and define the next line. It does not stop: it energises” (2003, 28).

One problem with plonking (§1.3.3) is its heavy-handed insistence on the end of every line, which does not energise: each line crawls along like a wounded animal towards its inevitable collapse in the fifth foot.

Persistent endstopping in the verse throws particular weight and importance upon the last word in each line, and makes the verse more stately and formal, just as avoidance of it makes it more rapid, energetic and colloquial; as Shakespeare’s skills developed he tended to introduce more and more run-on lines into his dramatic verse. Here is part of a second and more lively account of a storm at sea from the other end of Shakespeare’s career, in which Prospero, in a state of great agitation, explains that his enemies “durst not” kill him:

(131) ➤62
So dear the love my people bore me; [nor set # ⇒
A mark so bloody on the business; [but + ⇒
[With colours fairer painted their foul ends]. †
In few, [they hurried us aboard a bark], †
Bore us some leagues to sea; [where they prepar’d # ⇒
A rotten carcass of a boat, [not rigg’d], †
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; [the very rats # ⇒
Instinctively have quit it. … (Tp. 1.2.140-48)

In run-on lines the grammar is incomplete at the line-end and we experience a pressure to complete the sense which is momentarily thwarted by the line-ending; that tension is released by the completion of the syntax in the next line, and the part that completes it is called the reject:

(132)
To have no screen between this part he play’d
And him he play’d it for, [he needs will be + ⇒
Absolute Milan] — me (pöor man) my library #
Was dukedom large enough (Tp. 1.2.107-10)
Obviously a run-on line cannot work in performance without the simultaneous presence of the metrical boundary and its syntactic over-riding; it is as wrong to ignore the former (which produces prose: “he needs will be absolute Milan”) as the latter (which produces plonking [§1.3.3]: “he needs will be Absolute Milan”), though both are common errors of the beginner. What experienced readers do is to co-opt the phonological rules of the language: syllables that mark a syntactic boundary are prolonged slightly, and so the easiest way to mark a run-on line-ending is to dwell upon and thus prolong slightly the final syllable, without letting the pitch of your voice rise or fall. This is a sort of vocal sleight of hand, which marks the metrical boundary without distorting grammar or sense. Take, for example, Shylock’s complaint at MV 1.3.108: “Signior Antonio, many a time and oft / In the Rialto you have rated me”. What he means is that Antonio has berated him many times – and often, indeed, in the Rialto, one of the most public places in Venice; if we plonk on “oft” and pause after it we mark the line-ending, but we lose the sense “oft in the Rialto” in return for a banal pleonasm (“many a time and oft”); if we say “many a time and oft in the Rialto you have rated me”, we get the desired sense, but it’s expressed in prose. If, however, we prolong “oft” slightly, so that it resembles in duration the “soft” in “This bed’s too soft.” rather than that in “Soft and sweet”, we get both rhythm and sense together: “Signior Antonio many a time and oft / In the Rialto you have rated me”.

Of course, run-on lines in Shakespeare are not simple mechanical consequences of the interaction of syntax and metre: they represent authorial choices, and in consequence it is always worth exploring whether they might encode instructions for performance – specifically, a hesitation. One can imagine Prospero hesitating slightly (though not plonking) as he formulates the precise nature of Antonio’s ambition: “he needs will be – Absolute Milan”). A clearer example occurs in one of Leontes’ rants about his imagined cuckoldry:

(133)  Inch-thick, knee-deep, o’er head and ears a fork’d one!

Go, play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, \[and I + ⇒

Play too\], but so disgrac’d a part, whose issue

Will hiss me to my grave.  \(WT\ 1.2.186–9\)

\[2\] Compare length of ‘two in “his [two-thousand-year-old] pots” (2,000-year old pots) with that in “his two [thousand-year-old] pots” (two 1,000-year old pots).
Repeating a word while shifting the meaning is a rhetorical figure (technical term: ‘àntanáclasis’), but the performance of dramatic verse is more effective and more engaging when it suggests not recitation but a mind in action; here the actor can perform the antanaclasis not as a prefabricated rhetorical figure but as emerging from a train of associative thought in the character’s mind. Leontes dismisses his little son with “Go, play, boy, play” and the word immediately strikes him as ironically applicable to his wife (*OED* 11.b “engage in amorous play”, and perhaps also 12.a. “mock, ridicule”). He goes on to consider his own position, hesitates as he gropes for an appropriate verb, and suddenly realises that the word applies to him, too, in a third (or fourth) sense: “and I – play too” (26.b “act a... part in a drama”), which goes on to suggest further theatrical metaphors in “part” and “hiss”. 

Energetic enjambment is sometimes (as here) an index of violent emotion. The violence of a run-on line-ending depends, as I remarked above, on three factors: the pressure to completion (stronger, for example, from adjective to noun that from subject to predicate), the size of the reject (the shorter and more compressed the reject, the more powerful the release of tension), and the degree of connectedness between the words that straddle the line-break, which is a slightly more complicated idea than terminal closure. In the following example, the fact that the line ends in a preposition is much less disruptive than it might have been because the preposition governs a whole clause rather than a single noun:

(134) ➤ 65

King: Read o’er this, / And after, this, and then to breakfast [with + ⇒ 
# What + appetite # you + have.\] (H8 3.2.202)

Compare the disruptiveness of (135), exacerbated by its shorter reject:

(135) ➤ 66

And after, this; and then to breakfast [with + ⇒ 
Relish], my noble lord.

The following passage moderates what would otherwise be highly disruptive run-on lines by inserting parentheticals (italicised) between the line-terminal word and what it connects grammatically to:

(136) ➤ 67

This child was pris’ner to the womb, and [is † ⇒ 
By law and process of great Nature] [thence] †
Freed and enfranchis’d]; not [a party to + ⇒

The anger of the King], nor [guilty of † ⇒

(If any be) the trespass of the Queen. †

(WT 2.2.57-61)

Compare the genuinely (and ineptly) disruptive run-on lines in this flabby passage from The Atheist’s Tragedy, in which the Type 3 line-terminal words are connected rather directly to the following word or phrase:

(137)

Spare so much out of that, [to give him a - ⇒

Solemnity of funeral]. 'Twill quit #

The cost; and make [your apprehension of + ⇒

His death] appear more confident and true. †

(The Atheist’s Tragedy)

§3.2: Transitions Between Speakers

§3.2.1: Shared or Divided Lines (Part-lines)

Many lines in a Shakespeare play are divided between speakers, both – or each – supplying a part-line to make up the whole (we can think of this as a special case of the caesura). In the following example, Antony speaks the first two feet but is interrupted by Cleopatra, who provides the last three:

(138)

Antony: The gods| bèst know|–

Cleopatra: Ó, ne|ver wäs| there queen|

So mightily betray’d!

(AC 1.3.24)

Arranging part-lines horizontally on the page to illustrate their relatedness, as in (138), is a helpful editorial convention that arose at the end of the eighteenth century. Because that relatedness is important, editions that fail to represent it, such as Jonathan Bates’s RSC Shakespeare (Macmillan 2007), should be avoided. Nonetheless, because of the collaborative nature of textual production in the period we cannot always be absolutely sure, in those cases where there is room for ambiguity, that the given arrangement on the page reflects authorial intentions about lineation, and different editors may arrange them in different ways. The following points, therefore, are not cast-iron rules as much as suggestions to be explored: if the suggested manoeuvre makes no sense in the context, it can be safely abandoned.
If a speech ends in a fragment there may be a slight discontinuity before the next speech begins; if it ends in a part-line, on the other hand, the next speaker is instructed to pick up the cue fairly promptly (Barton 1984, 32). Take the following exchange:

(139) 68
Gratiano: <I have| a suit| to yŏu|.
Bassanio: <You have| obtain’d|( it.
Gratiano: ^ You| must not| deny| me: I| must go
With you to Belmont.3
Bassanio: <Why then| you must|. But hear| thee, Gra|tia|no: (MV 2.2.176-9)

Bassanio’s instinctive generosity is suggested by the way he grants the yet-unknown suit without hesitation, by completing Gratiano’s part-line “<I have| a suit| to yŏu|.”; his subsequent natural caution about taking his boisterous companion to Belmont, however, is suggested by the fact that the fragment “With you to Belmont.” is left dangling – Shakespeare could have written something like:

(140)
Gratiano: ^ You| must not| deny| me: I| must go
<With you| to Bel|mont.
Bassanio: What|? <Shall I| deny|( you?

One source of ambiguity in lineation is the so-called ‘amphibious section’, a fragment which as a part line both completes the preceding part-line and is itself completed by the following part-line, like “Alack, why thus?” in (141). Some editions print such sequences as three fragments, without indentation. Others will choose one of the two possible arrangements, not always well advisedly: the Riverside, for example, disconnects Kent’s response from Albany’s question in (141) and turns Edmund’s self-involved musing into a prompt response to Kent:

(141) 69
Albany: Speak, Edmund, where’s the King? and where’s Cordelia?
Seest thou this object, Kent?
Kent: Alack|, why thus|?

3 All the earliest texts print “You must not… to Belmont” as one impossibly long line.
3. Pauses, Breaks and Transitions

Edmund: Yet Edmund was belov’d.

*The one the other poison’d for my sake,* ...

\[(KL\ 5.3.240)\]

Common sense suggests that the arrangement should be:

\[(142)\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALBANY: &lt;See’st thou&gt; this ob’ject, Kent?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KENT: Alack, why thus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDMUND: Yet Edmund was belov’d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verses with multiple-shared part-lines may look fragmented on the page, but in performance they should usually be tightly bound together. The rapid pick-ups in the following divided alexandrine indicate the eagerness of the fairies to obey their queen:

\[(143)\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITANIA: Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustardseed!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEASEBLOSSOM: &lt;Ready&gt;:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COBWEB: And I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTH: And I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSTARDSEED: And I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL: &lt;Where shall we go?&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[(MND\ 3.1.163)\]

In the next example it underscores the uncanny univocality of the Weird Sisters, as each answers in the number of syllables corresponding to her position in the trinity:

\[(144)\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MACBETH: ... answer me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TO WHAT I ASK YOU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST WITCH: Speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND WITCH: Demand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD WITCH: We’ll an’(swer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[(Mac.\ 4.1.61)\]

A well-known example of a much-divided line is the passage in which King John is hinting to Hubert the gaoler that he’d like to be rid of his prisoner, the child Prince Arthur:
Because Hubert initially appears unable or unwilling to catch on to the king’s infanticidal intentions, the latter abandons circumlocution (though still maintaining what the CIA calls ‘plausible deniability’ by avoiding explicit assertion or command) in line 65, which consists of the single monosyllabic word “Death”, the smallest fragment possible (though its weight fills the whole line). It’s followed by an indefinite pause in which Hubert absorbs and digests it. His eventual “My lord?” is a groping for confirmation, which the king instantly supplies, and Hubert immediately agrees to do it: because they’re talking about murdering a child they want to spend as little time as possible doing so (“Enough!”), which accounts for the rapid pick-up of cues throughout the line.

There is a different reason for the rapid pick-up in the following passage (three lines with seven changes of speaker): it is the jumpy wound-up energy (underscored by the jolts in lines 17 and 18) of two novice criminals whose nerves are frayed to the limit. One critic, alluding to Lady Macbeth’s violin-tuning metaphor (“Screw your courage to the sticking-place”), remarked “we can almost hear ‘the snapping of the strings’”:4

Lady Macbeth: ^Ay|.
Macbeth: ^Hark|! – Who lies| I’th’se|cond cham|ber?
Lady Macbeth: ^D|nalbain|.
Macbeth: <This is> a so|rry sight|. (Mac. 2.2.16-18)

§3.2.2: Stichomythia

Stichomythia (rhymes with pithier) may be thought of as a special case of endstopping; in stichomythia, characters exchange single complete lines, so that what might have been conversation turns into something like ritual or liturgy. Hence stichomythia can be used as a kind of distancing formality; in the following passage, for example, it serves (with the help of elaborately artificial rhetorical patterning) to keep the absurd predicament of the lovers at emotional arm’s length, so we can enjoy the mishaps in the woods:

(147) ►
Lysander: The course of true love never did run smooth;
      But either it was different in blood –
Hermia: O cross! too high to be enthrall’d to low.
Lysander: Or else misgraffed in respect of years –
Hermia: O spite! too old to be engag’d to young.
Lysander: Or else it stood upon the choice of friends –
Hermia: O hell! to choose love by another’s eyes. (MND 1.1.134-40)

It works in a similarly distancing way in Twelfth Night:

(148) ►
Olivia: I prithee tell me what thou think’st of me.
Viola: That you do think you are not what you are.
Olivia: If I think so, I think the same of you.
Viola: Then think you right: I am not what I am.
Olivia: I would you were as I would have you be!
Viola: Would it be better, madam, than I am?
      I wish it might, for now I am your fool. (TN 3.2.146-152)

Stichomythia is particularly effective in combative situations (the OED describes its Greek original as “employed in sharp disputation, and characterised by antithesis and rhetorical repetition or taking up of the opponent’s words”),
because the avoidance of shared lines suggests a complete failure to engage with each other’s point of view, as in the following exchange between Shylock and Bassanio:

(149)

Shylock: I am not bound to please thee with my answers.
Bassanio: Do all men kill the things they do not love?
Shylock: Hates any man the thing he would not kill?
Bassanio: Every offence is not a hate at first.
Shylock: What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice? (MV 4.1.65-9)

Stichomythia lends itself to agonistic displays that have something of the feel of a tennis-match, a metaphor explicitly invoked by the Princess in the following example:

(150)

Rosaline: Look what you do, you do it still i’ th’ dark.
Katharine: So do not you; for you are a light wench.
Rosaline: Indeed, I weigh not you; and therefore light.
Katharine: You weigh me not? O, that’s you care not for me.
Rosaline: Great reason; for past cure is still past care.
Princess: Well bandied both; a set of wit well play’d. (LLL 5.2.17-29)

In the early plays such ‘tennis-matches’ of stichomythia can become quite artificially protracted; Richard III exchanges 24 lines of stichomythia with Queen Elizabeth (R3 4.4.343-67) in a vain attempt to secure her daughter’s hand, and the relentless ping-pong parrying of his approaches underscores King Richard’s ironic inability to reproduce Gloucester’s triumphant wooing of Lady Anne.

Stichomythia is not confined, however, to early plays, as in the case of this more naturalistic exchange from Hamlet:

(151)

Queen: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.
Queen: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Hamlet: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue. (Ham. 3.4.9ff.)
4. The Short Pentameter 1: Silent Offbeats

“this gap of breath” (*King John*, 3.4.32)

It is a commonplace that pentameter is distinguished from, for example, nursery rhyme in that it regulates the number of syllables in the line. In fact the matter is, as we have seen, slightly more complicated than this, because what is regulated is the number of syllable-slots in the template; although normally one slot corresponds to one syllable, in certain circumstances (contraction, for example) a slot may contain two. Even more oddly, under certain circumstances a slot need not be occupied by a syllable at all; such an ‘empty’ slot may be termed a ‘lacuna’. In Shakespeare’s dramatic verse the lacuna is not a lapse or a metrical license but a rhythmic device, operating for the most part in one of two ways; ‘deictically’ (acting as a pointer, marker or signal) or ‘mimetically’ (representing or imitating speech patterns). Before the joust in *R2* 1.3, for example, the Marshal cries suddenly to the combatants “Stay, the king hath thrown his war|der down”, announcing King Richard’s theatrically timed interruption. The surprise of the silent initial offbeat – a little like treading in the dark on a step that isn’t there – deictically draws attention to Richard’s *coup de théâtre* and mimetically conveys the abruptness of the herald’s injunction. We may represent such silent offbeats, depending on their nature, by means of a caret (^) or a tilde (~,≈):

(152)
\[
\texttt{\^ Stay}, \text{the King| hath thrown| his war|der down|.} \quad (R2 1.3.118)
\]

It is a mistake to refer to lacunae as ‘missing syllables’, as some writers do, because they represent not absences but differently realised presences. Such language also tends to imply that the basis of the pentameter is syllabic (rather than positional) and that short pentameters are therefore defective: because
of this widespread perception, short pentameters do not occur at all in the ‘literary’ tradition from Spenser to Tennyson, even in Shakespeare’s own non-dramatic verse, though they are found in Wyatt, at the beginning of the modern pentameter tradition, and re-appear in the twentieth century.1 Shakespeare’s editors, starting with the redactors of the Second Folio (1632), have shared this misconception and, anxious to defend their poet against the traditional charges of artlessness and lawlessness, have attempted to eliminate lacunae through emendation and relineation (see Groves 2007). With line (152), for example, early editors would ‘repair’ the ‘problem’ by arbitrarily inserting a “But” before “Stay”; later ones have been more cautious, though the New Arden 2 edition suggests the Broad Australian pronunciation “throw-en” to supposedly ‘regularise’ the line – by creating three successive reversals [“<Stay, the><king hath><throwën> …”]). Perhaps the most surprising thing about this editorial horror lacunae is its persistence in the teeth of the evidence, given that the lacuna was identified as an option in Shakespeare’s verse as early as E. A. Abbott’s Shakespearean Grammar (1879), a grammatical source much relied upon by modern editors.

This mind-set explains, incidentally, why it is that such an important system of signification in Shakespeare’s verse has been so widely overlooked for so long: if lines with ‘missing syllables’ are something that shouldn’t even exist, shameful lapses in arithmetic to be corrected or tidied away where possible, they are unlikely be explored as part of a system of meaning. The fact that for the most part we don’t notice them is testimony to the fact that we interpret them unconsciously as part of the metre, not as lapses from it. I should add that I do not see lacunae as deliberate attempts to communicate instructions to the actor, even though they usually have some such effect, because if they were so we might expect their use to be more systematic. Rather they represent, I suspect, Shakespeare’s auditory imagination occasionally incorporating pause and gesture into the metrical and prosodic structure of the line. Speaking of vocative phrases such as “My lord”, Steve Urkowitz recently enjoined us to:

    pay more attention to such “indicative” or deictic markers in Shakespearean dialog.

Pointing to or calling out to people and things seems an almost obsessive verbal function in the dialogue. “Ye powers,” and “O Nature”

---

1 Beginning with Yeats (eg “<Speech af-ter long| ~ si|lence: It| is right|”, line 1 of “After Long Silence”, or “A gaze| = blank| and pi|tileless âs| the sun|”, line 15 of “The Second Coming”). For further discussion of this see Groves (2005, 2001).
and that run-of-the-mill “my Lord” encourage vigorous verbal and physical actions of pointing and looking. If I may suggest further, I think it is just this dense web of actions that makes Shakespeare so appealing to actors and audiences. Doing Shakespeare means that you’re always doing, acting, involving your own fictional persona with the fictions of those others on stage. It’s called playing. If you find yourself snoozing at a performance, just check to see if the actors are using those ‘addresses’ as vocal springboards or instead are sliding past them.²

It is significant that so many of the pauses and gestures cued by lacunae occur, as we shall see, at moments of “pointing to or calling out to people and things”.

§4.1: The ‘Jolt’

The silent offbeat {technical term: ‘catalexis’} comes in two distinct flavours: (a) the jolt (^), which occurs between tone-units, in a syntactic cut, and which has the effect of emphasising the discontinuity; and (b) the much rarer drag (∼, ≈), which occurs within a phrase or at a flaw and has the effect of locally slowing down the tempo and forcing accent on the syllable that precedes it. Very occasionally a jolt will be required at a crack, as in (164): the effect here is of a performative, extra-grammatical pause as Prospero hesitates over a choice.

§4.1.1: The Initial Jolt (‘Headless Line’)

To begin a line with an unrealised offbeat produces a slight surprise, as in the case of the initial reversal; the surprise is continued, however, in that the ‘missing’ offbeat receives no compensation: instead of the familiar pattern DUM de-de DUM it lurches along: DUM de DUM. Shakespeare uses initial jolts deictically as a way of grabbing attention for a command (“Go!”, “Stay!”), a vocative (or ‘hailing’) use of a name or phrase (“Titus!”, “Gentlemen!”) and other abrupt openings:

(153) ►

^ Go|, t̲à|ke h|ence| that trai|tor fr̝|m| our sight|,  \(2H6\ 2.3.100\)

^ Come|, m̲y l̲ɔrd|, I’ll lea|d| you t̲ɔ| your tent|.  \(1H4\ 5.4.9\)

Such verses are commonly called ‘headless’, but a headless verse can have ten syllables if it acquires a tail (§2.2.5). The obvious example is Lear’s famous “^ Ne|ver, ne|ver, ne|ver, ne|ver, ne|ver, ne|ver!” (5.3.308),³ but there are many others:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{^Come, } \text{good fel|low, put| mine i|ron on|.} \quad (AC\ 4.4.4) \\
& \text{^Prove| it, Hen|ry, ānd| thou sh.Sp| be King}. \quad (3H6\ 1.1.131) \\
& \text{^Speak|, Lavi|n’a, what| accur|sèd hand|} \quad (Tit.\ 3.1.66) \\
& \text{^Give| me leave|, beseech| you. Í| did send|} \quad (TN\ 3.1.111) \\
& \text{^Read| the will|, we’ll hear| it, An|toný|.} \quad (JC\ 3.2.147) \\
& \text{^Let| me tell| you, Ca|sius, yôu| yourself|} \quad (JC\ 4.3.9) \\
& \text{^Die|, <perish>! Might bêt| my ben|ding down|} \quad (MM\ 3.1.144) \\
& \text{^Worces|ter, get| thee gone|; <for Í| do see|} \quad (IH4\ 1.3.15) \\
& \text{^Jai|ler, take| him tô| thy cus|todý|.} \quad (CE\ 1.1.155) \\
& \text{^Ti|tus, Í| am come| to talk| with thée|.} \quad (Tit.\ 5.2.16) \\
& \text{^Soft|! it smells| mòst sweet|ly Ín| my sense|.} \quad (Per.\ 3.2.60) \\
& \text{^Out|, you rogue|! you pluck| my foot| awry|;} \quad (TS\ 4.1.150)
\end{align*}
\]

³ Many writers regard such lines as having five successive reversals, but the matter can be settled by Occam’s Razor: given that both tailed and headless lines occur throughout Shakespeare, but that successive reversals of even two feet are avoided, there is no need to postulate a special exemption rule that permits five successive reversals. Lines like those in (154) do not occur in traditions that do not permit headlessness (initial jolts).
so that it is extended from two syllable-positions into four (something similar happens with Cassius’ incredulous repetition of *flatterers*):

(155)  
Brutus: Bóy! Lu|c|i|us! Va|rr|o! Clau|d|ó! Sirs|, awake|!  
\[ Clau|d|ó|! \]  
Lucius: The strings|, my lord|, are false|.  
\[ JC 4.3.289-90 \]

*Antony:* You show’d your teeth like apes,…

\[ Whilst damnèd Casca, like a cur, behind \]  
\[ Struèck Cae|sar ŏn| the neck|. \]  
\[ ^ O| you fla|(tt|t)terers|! \]  
Cassius: ^Fla|tterĕrs|? <Nòw, Brùtus, thank| yourself|;  
\[ JC 5.1.44–5 \]

Headless verses are more difficult to spot when the first beat falls on a weak syllable, and a reader will most probably get them wrong at a first attempt, not initially seeing the need for a beat on the first syllable (some of them may, indeed, represent textual corruption):

(156)  
\[ ^ Thēy| were trai|tors; ho|noură|ble men|! \]  
\[ JC 3.2.153 \]  
\[ ^ Wē| are blest| that Rome| is rid| of hīm|. \]  
\[ JC 3.2.70 \]  
\[ ^ Tō| be spoke| to būt| by thē| Recor|l|er. \]  
\[ R3 3.7.30 \]  
\[ ^ Āt| a poor| mān’s house|; he us’d| me kind|ly. \]  
\[ Cor. 1.9.83 \]

Such lines encourage the performer to test for the possibility of contextually motivated accent on the initial syllable:

(157)  
\[ Lear: … No, I say. \]  
\[ KL F1 2.3.18 \]  
\[ Kent: \[ I| sày yea|\]. \]  
\[ Lear: By Ju|p|ter, I| swèar no|! \]  
\[ KL F1 2.3.18 \]

*Hermione:* You look / As if you held a brow of much distraction.

\[ ^ Arc| you mov’d|, my lord|? \]  
\[ ie Am I correct in my guess? \]  
\[ Leontes: \<No, in> gòod ear|(nest. \]  
\[ WT 1.2.150 \]

*Antony:* [stubbornly] I’ll fight at sea.

Cleopatra: ^I| have six|ty sails|, <Caesar> none be|(tter.  
\[ AC 3.7.49 \]
§4.1.2: The Medial Jolt

A medial jolt is a catalexis that falls in a cut within the line, and its simplest function is similar to that of the initial jolt: to throw emphasis — that is, to cue the presence of accent — on the word that follows it:

(158) ►
Menenius: <You and> your crafts! ^You| have crafted fair! (Cor. 4.6.117)

Martius: Yonder comes news: a wager they have met.
Lartius: My horse to yours, ^no|.
Martius: 'Tis done.
Lartius: Agreed. (Cor. 1.4.2)

Proteus: Bear witness, heaven, I have my wish for ever.
Julia: And I ^mine|.
Outlaws: A prize|, a prize|, a prize! (TGV 5.4.121)

Antony: Thy master dies thy scholar. To do thus [Falling on his sword]

Timon: [Gold will] … place thieves / And give them title, knee, and approbation,
With se|tors on| the bench|. ^This| is it|
That makes the wappen'd widow wed again (Tim. 4.3.38)

Alcibiades: Is this the balsam that the us'ring Senate
<Pours in>to cap|tains' wounds|? ^Ba|nishměnt|? (Tim. 3.5.110)

Jolts commonly highlight the emphatic nature of the interjection ‘O’:

(159) ►
Hamlet: … a plot / Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide| the slain|? ^O|, from this| time forth|,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (Ham. 4.4.65)

Helena: Is all the counsel that we two have shar'd,…
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For par|ting us| - ^O|, is all| forgot|? (MND 3.2.201)
Portia: One half of me is yours, the other half yours —
Mine own, I would say; but if mine, then yours,
And so all yours.

Goneril: the difference of man and man!

As in the case of the initial jolt, the medial jolt may foreground an imperative (a command):

(160) ▼ 82
Lady Macbeth: ... The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal enterance of Duncan
Under my battlements, Come, you spirits,

Goneril: Inform her full of my particular fear,
And thereto add such reasons of your own
As may compact it more. Get you gone,

York: <Yea, look'st thou pale?>^ Let me see the writing

Isabella: <I will proclaim thee, Angel, look for't!

Caesar: ... Within our files there are
Of those that serv'd Mark Antony but late
Enough to fetch him in. See it done,

King Richard: ^ Set it down. Is ink and paper ready?
Ratcliff: It is, my lord.

King Richard: <Bid my> guardar watch; ^ leave me.

Ghost: Harry, that prophesied thou shouldst be King,
Doth comfort thee in thy sleep. ^ Live and flourish!

Servant: I never saw so huge a billow, sir,
As toss'd it upon shore.

Cerimon: ^ Wrench it o'pen;
Countess: Unless her prayers... reprieve him from the wrath
Of greatest justice. Write, write, Rinaldo,
To this unworthy husband of his wife;

( AW 3.4.29)

Or a vocative:

(161) ►
Puck: But room, fayre! Here comes Oberon.

( MND 2.1.58)

Troilus: You have bereft me [of all] words, lady.

( TC 3.2.54)

Ulysses: Those scraps are good deeds past, ... forgot as soon
As done. Perséverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright; ...

( TC 3.3.150)

Cymbeline: ... It strikes me past
The hope of comfort. To Pisanio: But for thee, follow,

( Cym. 4.3.9)

Cordelia: That wants the means to lead it. [Enter Messenger]

Messenger: News, dam. (KL 4.4.20)

Imogen: And like the tyrannous breathing of the north
Shakes all our buds from growing.

Lady: The Queen, dam, Desires your Highness’ company.

( Cym. 1.3.37)

Northumberland: He that but fears the thing he would not know
Hath by instinct knowledge from others’ eyes
That what he fear’d is chanc’d. Yet speak, Morston,

(2H4 1.1.87)

Edmund: I have seen drunkards
Do more than this in sport. – Father, father!

(KL 2.1.35)

Capulet: Nurse! Nurse! Wife! Whát, ho! Whát, nurse, I say!

(RJ 4.4.24)

The medial jolt can also signal a change of addressee, perhaps with a turn of the head:
4. The Short Pentameter 1: Silent Offbeats

(162) ➤

**Cornwall:** [To Gloucester] Make your own purpose,

<How in> my strength| you please|. For you|, ^ Ed|mund,

(KL 2.2.112)

**Cymbeline:** Not seen of late? Grant, heavens, that which I fear

Prrove false|! [Exit]

**Queen:** ^ Son|, I say|, <follow> the King|.

(Cym. 3.5.53)

**Malcolm:** … This is the sergiant

Who like a good and hardy soldier fought

<Gainst my> capti|vit|. ^ Hail|, brave friend|!

(Mac. 1.2.5)

**Prospero:** They are both in either’s pow’re; but this swift business

I must uneasy make, lest too light winning

<Make the> prize light|. – ^ One| word more|; I charge|( thee:

(Tp. 1.2.453)

**Paris:** It is great morning; and the hour prefix’d

For her deliv’ry to this valiant Greek

Cômes fast| upon|, ^ Good| my bro|ther Troi|lus,

Tell you the lady what she is to do,

(TC 4.3.3)

**Antony:** Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,

<Take thou> what course| thou wilt|! ^ How| now|, fe|low?

(JC 3.2.261)

**Lucius:** <Varro> and Clau|dius|! [Enter VARRO and CLAUDIUS]

Varro:

^ Calls| my Lord|?

(JC 4.3.246)

**Brutus:** <Luc’us>! My gown|. ^ Fare|well|, good| Messa|la;

(JC 4.3.231)

Or a shift of topic:

(163) ➤

**Petruchio:** But soft|! ^ Com|pany| is com|ing here|.

(TS 3.5.26)

**Pistol:** Old I do wax; and from my weary limbs

<Honour> is cu|dgell’d. Well|, ^ bawd| I’ll turn|,

(HS 5.1.85)
Leontes: the tenth of mankind

Would hang| themselves|, ^Phy|sic for’t| there’s none|; (WT 1.2.200)

Dolabella: <And he| hath sent| for thë|e|. ^For| the Queen|,

I’ll take her to my guard. (AC 5.2.66)

King: Côme hi| ther, Count|. ^Dô| you know| these wo|(men? (AW 5.3.165)

The jolt can also work mimetically, to represent interrupted speech: it can, for example, indicate a pause or hesitation. In the following examples it represents the ‘thinking on the fly’ or ‘er-um’ pause: Prospero, arbitrarily instructing Ariel to make a diegetically pointless costume-change that will be “invisible / To every eyeball else”, seems to hesitate whimsically before the final selection (a modern playwright might write “Go make yourself – [thinks] – like a nymph of the sea”):

(164) ►

Gò make| thyself| ^like| a nymph| o’th’sea|; (Tp. F1 1.2.301)

Gonzalo, inventing a Utopia on the spur of the moment, hesitates a couple of times in deciding on its elements:

(165) ►

<Letters> should nôt| be known|; ^rich|es, po|verty,
And use| of ser|vice, none|; <contract>, succe|(sion

Bòurn, bound| of land|, ^tilth|, ^vine|yard, none|; (Tp. 2.1.151-3)

Northumberland, rebuked by York for referring to the doomed king prematurely as mere ‘Richard’, hesitates before arriving at an insultingly weak excuse:

(166)

Your Grace| mistakes|; ^only tô| be brief|, / Left I his title out. (R2 3.3.10)

Hamlet, groping for a plan of action that will be an alternative to mere words, needs two thinking-hesitations and a “Hm” in the one line:

(167) ►

Hamlet: About|, my brains!! ^Hm| – ^I| have heard|
That guilty creatures sitting at a play, … (Ham. 2.2.588)
Sometimes the medial jolt represents a catch in the voice at a moment of high emotion (as also in (159)):

(168) ▶

**Duncan:** … *My plenteous joys, / Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves*

In *drops* of sorrow. Sons, *kinsmen*, thanes, *(Mac. 1.4.36)*

**Cleopatra:** <Antony’s dead!> *^if thou say* so, vilain,

*Thou killest thy mistress;* *(AC 2.5.26)*

**Antony:** *You did know / My sword, made weak by my affection, would*

Obey* it [on all] cause.*

**Cleopatra:** *^Par*don, par*(don! *(AC 3.11.68)*

**Prince Henry:** *How fares your Majesty?*

**King John:** <Poison’d> *^ill-fare! Dead*, forsook, *cast off*, *(KJ 5.7.35)*

Alternatively (it depends, of course, on the context of meaning), the jolt can evoke a sudden start: incredulity, anger, or the feigned exasperation of Petruchio:

(169) ▶

**Menenius:** The *consul* Coriolanus.

**Brutus:** *He?* *(Cor. 3.1.278)*

**Ulysses:** *’Tis known, Achilles, that you are in love*

With one of Priam’s daughters.

**Achilles:** *Ha?* *(TC 3.3.194)*

**Nurse:** <May not one speak?>

**Capulet:** *^Peace*, you mumbling fool!* *(RJ 3.5.173)*

**Leontes:** *Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?*

Hours, minutes? noon, *^midnight?* [And all] eyes

*Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,* *(WT 1.2.290)*

**Petruchio:** What’s *this*>? *^Mutton?*

**First servant:** *Ay*.

**Petruchio:** Who brought it?

**Peter:** *I*. *(TS 4.1.160)*
Jolts in successive feet are always mimetic: they can represent Lady Macbeth’s jumpiness as she waits for her husband to return from the murder, or Hamlet’s bafflement at Horatio’s reference to having seen ‘him’ the previous night when the only possible antecedent of ‘him’ is the dead King Hamlet:

(170) ► 91

Lady Macbeth: ^Hark! ^Peace! <It was| the owl| that shriek’d|,

(Mac. F1 2.2.3)4

Horatio: My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

Hamlet: ^Saw| ? ^Who|?

Horatio: My lord| the King| your fa|(ther. (Ham. 1.2.190)

Note that when successive jolts begin the line it is important to establish their timing: if in (170) we utter “Hark! Peace!” or “Saw? Who?” too quickly, the listener will take them in each case for a single foot with superstrong offbeat (§2.3.3) and so lose the violent effect of the jolts. The explosive quality of successive jolts is well suited to the expression of anger:

(171) ► 92

Lear: Blów, winds| and crack| your cheeks|! ^Rage|, ^blow,

(KL 3.2.1)

Timon: ^Gold| ? ^Ye|llow, gli|tt’ring, pre|cious gold|?

(Tim. 4.3.26)

Capulet: God’s bread| it makes| me mad!/ ^Day|, ^night|,

^Hour|, ^tide|, ^time|, ^work|, ^lay|

Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match’d … 5

(RJ F1 3.5.176)

It is also appropriate to indignation or defensiveness:

(172)

Solanio: ^Why then| you āre| in love|.

Antonio: ^Fie|, ^fie|!

(MV 1.1.46)

4 Lines Mac. 2.1.5-7 as they appear in F1 need relineation; since Rowe, however, editors have routinely (and mistakenly) relineated the entire sequence 2.1.2-7.

5 F1 requires a slight shift in the line-boundary, since it reads “God’s bread, it makes me mad: / Day, night, houre, tide, time, worke, play, / Alone in companie, still my care hath bin”.

… Or in some other way to the pressure of strong emotion:

(173)

**Leontes:** *The purity and whiteness of my sheets*

*Which to preserve is sleep, which being spotted
  Is goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps*,

(WT 1.2.329)

**Paulina:** *What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?*

In leads or oils? *(WT 3.2.176)*

Shakespeare uses multiple or successive jolts to suggest alarm and consequent urgency, as in the case of Horatio (the paid-up rationalist) confronted by a ghost, Albany desperately trying to save Lear and Cordelia, or Banquo Fleance:

(174) ►

**Horatio:** ^Stay!, ^Speak!, speak, I charge thee speak! *(Ham. 1.1.51)*

**Edmund:** my writ / Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.

Náy, send in time.

**Albany:** ^Run!, run, Ó, run! *(KL 5.3.249)*

**Banquo:** ^Fly!, good Fle|ance, fly!, ^fly!, ^fly!, *(Mac. F1 3.3.17)*

§4.1.3: The Transitional Jolt

A medial jolt that occurs between two speakers most commonly has the mimetic effect of suggesting hesitation in the response, often because the second speaker is dissenting from the first speaker’s position. This may be through flat contradiction:

(175) ►

**Hermione:** You scarce can right me throughly, then, to say
<You did| mistake|.

**Leontes:** ^No|; <if I| mistake|

… The centre is not big enough to bear / A school-boy's top. *(WT 2.1.100)*

**Cleopatra:** Caesar’s will?

**Thidias:** <Hear it| apart|.

**Cleopatra:** ^None| but friends|: say bold|ly. *(AC 3.13.47)*
Or admonition:

(176)

**Ferdinand:** So rare a wond’red father and a wise

>Makes this place Paradise.<

**Prospero:**^ Sweet now, si(lence;  *(Tp. 4.1.124)*

Or a firm reservation:

(177)

**Brutus:** For he [Mark Antony] can do no more than Caesar’s arm

>When Caesar’s head is off.

**Cassius:**^ Yet I fear him,  *(JC 2.1.183)*

At times the transitional jolt may represent a kind of double-take, as when Hamlet (in F1) responds with astonishment to Gertrude’s attempt to dismiss his criticisms as ‘ecstasy’ (temporary madness), Bolingbroke is surprised to find King Richard in Flint Castle, Caesar’s centurion is amazed to come across Enobarbus soliloquising in a ditch, or Coriolanus reacts with an incredulous rage to Aufidius’ disrespectful mode of address:

(178) ►

**Gertrude:** This bodiless creation ecstasy [temporary madness]

>Is very cunning.

**Hamlet:**^ Ecstasy?

>My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time,  *(Ham. 3.4.139)*

**Percy:** The castle royally is manned, my lord,

>Against thy entrance.

**Bolingbroke:**^ Really?

>Why, it contains no king.

**Percy:** Yes, my good lord,  *(R2 3.3.23)*

**Enobarbus:** Bear hateful memory, poor Enobarbus did

>Before thy face repent!

**Centurion:**^ Nobar?  *(AC F1 4.9.10)*

**Aufidius:** Ay, traitor, Marcius!

**Coriolanus:**^ ‘Martiush?  *(Cor. 5.8.87)*
When Polixenes clumsily casts his wife and Hermione in the role of the 'temptations' that led him and Leontes into sin, she mimics a startle of horrified dissent ("Grace to boot!" = "God help us!"):

(179)

Polixenes: Your precious self had then not cross’d the eyes
Of [my young] play[fellōw].
Hermione: ^Grace| to boot!|
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils. (WT 1.2.80)

More frequently, however, the transitional jolt suggests a more polite or tentative demurral, as with the puzzled Gloucester responding to his unknown guide, Antigonus diplomatically questioning the judgment of his king, Perdita attempting to qualify the rashness of Prince Florizel, or the tribune Brutus declining to respond to what he sees as the deranged insults of Volumnia:

(180) ►

Gloucester: Methinks the ground is e’en.
Edgar: Horrible steep.
   <Hark, do> you hear| the sea|?
Gloucester: ^No|, ^truly.

Leontes: We need no more of your advice. The matter,
The loss, the gain, the ord’ring on’t, is all
<Proper>ly ours|.
Antigonus: ^And| I wish|, my liege|,
You b’d only in your silent judgment tried it, (WT 2.1.170)

Florizel: my desires / Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts
Bůrn ho|tter thān| my faith|.
Perdita: ^O| but, sir|,
Your resolution cannot hold … (WT 4.4.35)

Volumnia: Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth
As I can of those mysteries which heaven
<Will not| hāve earth| to know|.
Brutus: ^Pray| let’s go|. (Cor. 4.2.38)
Emilia gently dissents from her sister-in-law’s view that true love is possible between the sexes:

(181)

**Hippolita:** *I will now in, and kneel, with great assurance
That we, more than his Pyrothous, possess
The high| throne in> his heart|.*

**Emilia:** ^I am not|
*Against your faith, yet I continue mine.* (TNK 1.3.96)

In *Julius Caesar* the third citizen is skeptical of the idea that Caesar has “had great wrong”, but thinks nonetheless that killing him was a bad idea, since “there will a worse come in his place”:

(182)

**Second Citizen:** <Caesar> has had| grèat wrong|.

**Third Citizen:** ^Has he, mas| ters? I fear| there will| a worse| <come in> his place|.

(JC 3.2.110)

Prospero’s response to his prospective son-in-law’s promise of premarital chastity carries in its transitional jolt a hint of skeptical reserve (borne out by the fact that he renews his admonitions on the subject within twenty lines) – indeed, an actor might be tempted to put contrastive accent on *spoke* (since ‘words are no deeds’):

(183)

**Ferdinand:** *When I shall think or Phoebus’ steeds are founder’d
Or Night| keep| chain’d below|.*

**Prospero:** ^Fairly spoke|.

(Tp. 4.1.31)

Of course, hesitation doesn’t necessarily signal disagreement. In the following example, the transitional jolt represents Messala’s sympathetic reluctance to confirm what seems to be unwelcome news:

(184) ►97

**Brutus:** *seventy senators that died / By their proscriptions, Cicero being one.*

---

6 This verse raises an interesting question, in that it requires one contraction but contains more than one elidable. <By their| proscriptions, Cicero being one> is the least marked line because it contracts the least important word (as opposed to <By their| proscriptions,
Cassius: <Cicer>o one?

Messala: ^Ci|cerō| is dead], (JC 4.3.179)

The murderer of Banquo is similarly unwilling to announce the escape of Fleance, knowing how much Macbeth wanted him dead:

(185) ▶98

Murderer: Most ro|yal sir], ^Fle|ance is| escap’d]. (Mac. 3.4.19)

Juliet’s nurse hesitates twice before giving what she knows must be unwelcome advice:

(186) ▶99

Juliet: What say’st thou? Hast thou not a word of joy?

Some com|fort, nurse].

Nurse: ^Fa|ith], ^here| it is].

… I think it best you married with the County. (RJ 3.5.214)

Nestor’s response to Ulysses’ cunning plan, on the other hand, involves a slight deliberative pause, as befits his senatorial dignity:

(187)

Ulysses: The seeded pride … / In rank Achilles must or now be cropp’d

Or, shedding, breed a nurs’ry of like evil

To o|verbulk| us all].

Nestor: ^W|ell], and how|?

(TC 1.3.320)

What George Wright calls Claudio’s “laconic” hesitation in expressing gratitude for “an offer that, under the circumstances, he finds rather empty” (177) is registered by a jolt between speakers:

(188) ▶100

Isabella: O, were it but my life!

>Cicero being one]; a third, more artificial option would contract both words and expand “proscriptions”, as two lines later: <By their| proscrip|tions], <Cicero> being one].

7 Most editions, following F1, print ‘scap’d, making this a random tetrameter in a pentameter dialogue, but given that Shakespeare uses escape(d) and aphetic ’scape(d) as what Sipe (1968) calls metrical variants (cp “Some i|nnocents| <’scape not> the thun|derbolt|,” (AC 2.5.77) and “<That has| to-day| escap’d|. I thank| you all|,” (AC 4.8.4) my pentameter reading of the line is plausible and effective.
I’d throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.

Claudio: ^Thanks|, deär I|(sabel. (MM 3.1.105)

Occasionally, a jolt between speakers may occur at the beginning of the line, as in the Captain’s contradiction of Hamlet:

(189)

Hamlet: Why, then the Polack never will defend it.
Captain: ^Yes|, <it is| already ga|rri|son|d>. (Ham. 4.4.24)

§4.2: The ‘Drag’

A drag is a less common kind of silent offbeat that occurs where there is no cut, and not even a crack. It produces an entirely different effect from a jolt: where jolts create a jerky staccato rhythm that disconnects, drags make a phrase smooth and connected (or legato). Drags occur either within a phrase (ie an internal drag, represented by ‘~’, as between an adjective and the noun it modifies), or between phrases at a flaw (an external drag, represented by ‘≈’; for ‘flaw’, see §1.3.2). In practical terms it is not important to distinguish the two types of drag, but you need to know how to do so if you wish to identify drags.

In a drag, the first syllable will typically be either dominated by or subordinated to the second, and will need to be liberated by accent before it can function as a beat. Take, for example, Enobarbus’ nine-syllabled verse “Lord of his reason. What though you fled”, from the post-mortem over the battle of Actium: editors since the eighteenth century have tried to ‘repair’ it by (for example) changing “though” to “although”, and it is true that out of context it appears to have only four beats with no opportunity for a jolt (which requires two fully independent syllables separated by a cut). In context, however, is clear that the pronoun ‘you’ should be accented to contrast it with ‘he’ two lines later: what Enobarbus is saying is “So what if you – a woman, unused to warfare – fled? Why should he – a hardened soldier – follow?” The accent in both cases allows the pronoun to function as the fourth of five beats, and produces a drag that forces a slowing down on the accented syllable:

(190) ►

Cleopatra: Is Antony or we in fault for this?
Enobarbus: Antony only, that would make his will
<Lord of> his reason. What| though you| fled
From that great face of war, whose several ranges
<Frighted> each other? Why should he follow? (AC 3.13.2-6)

Using accent in this way to disrupt the prototypical alternating metrical order introduces a kind of naturalism into the voice, but it remains a heightened naturalism, not a banal one. If you were to say “What though you fled? Why should he follow?” naturalistically, it would most likely have four beats, with the second and fourth beats attracted from the stressed syllables 4 and 8 onto the accented syllables that precede them. But this, of course, would not serve the metre, which requires beats on all four syllables. We deal with this in performance not by bunging an almost certainly inappropriate accent on the syllable after the drag but by timing: by prolonging (indeed, dragging out) the dragged syllable into a full measure: “Lord of his reason. What though you fled…? Why should he follow?” More examples:

(191) Sicinius: Pray you go to him. Menenius: What should I do? (Cor. 5.1.39)

Queen: Say his long trouble now is passing (H8 4.2.162)

Watchman: why commands the King
That his chief followers lodge in towns about him,
While he himself keeps in the cold field? (3H6 4.3.14)

Ariel: the fire and cracks / Of sulphurous roaring [the most] mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,
<Yea, his> dread trident shake.

Prospero: My brave spirit! (Tp. 1.2.206)

Ophelia: He falls to such perusal of my face
<As he would draw it. Long is stayed he so. (Ham. 2.1.88)>

Duncan: He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust. [Enter Macbeth] Ó worthiest cousin! (Mac. 1.4.14)

8 “Long” and “stayed” would, of course, normally be separated by a crack, but recall that where it is within one word of a cut, a crack becomes a mere flaw (§1.3.2).
Valentine: <Who should| be trus|ted, when| one’s right| ~ hand|> Is perjured to the bosom? (TGV 5.4.68)

Mutius: <And with| my sword| I’ll keep| this door| = safe. † (Tit. 1.1.288)

Sicinius: Your Cori|ola|nus| not much| ~ miss’d| (Cor. F1 4.6.13)

Chorus: Now we bear the King
    Toward Ca|lllice; grant| him there|; there| ≈ seen, † Heave him away upon your wingëd thoughts (H5 5.0.7)

This doesn’t mean, of course, that we shouldn’t accent the post-drag syllable if it needs it:

(192) ►

Lorenzo: Sweet friends, your patience for my long abode! …
    When you shall please to play the thieves for wives,
    <I’ll: watch| as long| for you| = then|, † Approach|; (MV 2.6.24)

Lady Macbeth: That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold.
    <What hath> quëch’d them| hath giv|en me| = fire| † (Mac. F1 2.1.3)

In the example from Macbeth, me contrasts with them and fire with quench’d; the consequent deceleration is appropriate to the sinister gloating quality of Lady Macbeth’s speech here.

Forcing a drag is thus a useful ‘pointing’ technique for Shakespeare, since it alerts the actor to the need for contextually motivated accent at a particular point. Thus Aëgeon, if he is to continue speaking pentameter, must contrast the low-born nature of the Dromios’ mother with his own wife’s status; Macbeth must put a degree of sarcastic spin on the word “worst” in his brow-beating of the murderers; and Isabella, desperately trying to explain a crucial moral distinction between ‘lawful mercy’ and ‘foul redemption’, must put an insistent accent on “two” (meaning ‘two quite distinct’) to make the line a pentameter.
It should be noted, however, that in every case the syllable following the drag must be uttered with more emphasis than it would in prose-speech, to allow it also to carry a beat:

(193) ►

Aëgeon: There had she not been long but she became
    A joy|ful mo|ther [of two] good|ly sons|;
That very hour, and in the self-same inn,
A mean| wo| man wäs| deli| verēd|

(MACBETH: Now, if you have a station in the file,
<Not i’> the worst| rank| of man| hood, say|( it,

ANTONY: There’s hope| in’t yet|.

CLEOPATRA: ^ That’s| my brave| lord!

ISABELLA: ^ Ig| nomy| in ran| som [and free] par| don
^ Åre| of two| hou| ses: law| ful mer| (cy
Is no| thing kin| to foul| redem| ptiōn|.

Certain modifiers, like all, are natural attractors for accent through dragging (it will be seen that drags commonly occur in the last foot, where the need for one is most easily predicted):

(194) ▶

IMOGEN: There is no more such masters. I may wander
From east to occident, cry out for service,
Trỳ ma| ny, all| good|; serve tru| ly, ne| (ver
Find such another master.

(MALCOLM: And here from gracious England have I offer
Of good| ly thou| sands. Bū| t|, for all| this|,

POSTHUMUS: Is there no way for men to be, but women
<Must be> half-wor| kers? Wē| are all| bas| (tards,

(ANTONY: you … have fought / Not as you serv’d the cause, but as’t had been
<Each man’s| like mine|; <you [have shöwn] all| Hec| tors. (AC 4.9.7)

Peter Hall interprets a superficially awkward verse from MND as containing a sequence of two drags (though he doesn’t, of course, put it that way) and an initial reversal, which by suggesting secret knowledge (“I know”) and slowing down the ending, with equal weight on the three last syllables, gives the line in performance an air of mysterious portentousness “to herald a magical invocation” (Hall 30): ▶

“<I know> a bank| where th’ wild| thyme| = blows|” (MND 2.2.249). The line is performed in this way in the RSC’s 1996 production directed by Adrian Noble for the UK’s Channel 5.
Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare
5. The Short Pentameter 2: Silent Beats

Tamora: ^Titus, I am come to talk with thee.

Titus: <No, not> a word, <How can> I grace my talk, <Wanting> a hand to give it action?

(Titus Andronicus, F1 5.2.16-18)

As we have seen, the silent beat or ‘rest’ (§1.5.3) is a structural feature of some kinds of demotic verse, where its predictability both in structure (occurring, for example, at every eighth beat in the ballad stanza) and in performance (due to the rather regularly timed ‘sing-song’ performance) permit it to be adequately signalled by a silence. Neither of these regularities obtains in sophisticated forms like pentameter, however, and so the natural assumption – one I long shared – is that Shakespeare makes no use of the silent beat. Yet Fredson Bowers has drawn attention to a couple of instances in the operatic love-duet at the beginning of Act 5 of The Merchant of Venice: there are six mid-line baton-changes in the passage, and in each case the second speaker begins with the two-foot refrain “In such a night”. The first two exchanges are straightforward, but as a realistic emblem of married love, the duet involves both co-operation and competition, harmony and discord. At the third, Lorenzo (in boldface) attempts to put Jessica (in italics) off her game with a caesural tail (or ‘feminine epic caesura’) on Car|thage; she remains unfazed, however, and lobs it right back to him (Ae|son). A colleague has suggested to me that a split line with a caesural tail might be an instruction to the second actor to ignore the tail and speak over it, which would work well here:¹

¹ John Bigelow (personal communication, December 2012). Lear in his first scene has the imperious habit of interrupting others (overlap bolded): “Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds Reverb no ho|llowness. / <Kent, on> thy life, no more.” (1.1.152); “Thy safe|ty be|ing mo|tive. / <Out of> my sight!” (1.1.155); “<Duchess> of Bur|gundy.
Lorenzo: … Where Cre|ssid lay| that night].
Jessica: In such| a night| …
And ran| dismayed| away].
Lorenzo: In such| a night| …
To come| again| to Car| (thage.\nJessica: In such| a night| …
That did| renew| old Ae| (son.\nLorenzo: In such| a night| …£107

Lorenzo’s response is to raise the stakes by giving her only two-and-a-half feet for the expected three, but she supplies the missing beat and returns an equivalent five-syllabled half-line to Lorenzo:

(196)
Lorenzo: Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
As far| as Bel| mont.
Jessica: <!> In such| a night|
Did young Lorenzo swear he lov’d her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne’er| a true| one.
Lorenzo: <!> In such| a night|
Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,
Slander her love, and he forgave it her. (MV 5.1.14–21)

As Bowers says, “the symmetry … can only be designed” (Bowers 99) – two normal transitions, two ‘excessive’ ones, and then two ‘defective’ ones – showing that Shakespeare clearly intended silent beats in this passage.

§5.1: Rests that Cue Stage Business

But how do Jessica and Lorenzo signal these silent beats? As we have seen, a pause – silence itself – will not do the job in pentameter verse, where such
lines are in any case rather rare. Just occasionally, a rest may be represented by a noise ‘off’:

(197) ►
He’s ta’en. [Shout <!> And hark], they shout| for joy].

But since beats represent muscular activity, peaks of effort in articulation, unexpected silent beats are more likely to be perceived through some form of surrogate gesture than through the precisely timed pauses that earlier writers seemed to imagine. An appropriately timed piece of business will supply the beat in both these cases – perhaps a playful admonitory tap from Jessica and a patronising kiss from Lorenzo.

Occasionally the beating of the verse is played out more violently on the human body, as in the case of the messenger both unlucky enough to bring the news of Antony’s marriage and reckless enough to recommend “pa-ti-ence” to Cleopatra:

(198) ►
Messenger: Óòod ma|dam, pa|tiënce|!
Hence, horr|’ble vi|llain! őr| I’ll spurn| thine eyes| …

(AC F1 2.5.63)

Othello: ^ Devil! <!>  [Strikes her.]
Desdemona: ^ I| have nôt| deserv’d|( this.

(Oth. 4.1.240)

The line from Othello is unusually complex in that it also includes an initial vocative jolt and a transitional demurral jolt.

Such ‘percussive’ rests may be more common than we suspect, given that the earliest editions are not very scrupulous about stage-directions: in the scene of Gloucester’s interrogation, for example, neither Regan’s plucking at his beard or Cornwall’s plucking out his eyes is given a stage-direction in F1 or QQ. But the scene, in its escalation from insult to torture, seems to require some episode of violence intermediate between beard-tweaking and eye-gouging, and between these two occurs a short pentameter that might plausibly cue a blow from Regan, to punish Gloucester for his disobedience (“Wast thou not charg’d at peril – ?”):

2 This stage direction is from the First Folio.
It would not be out of character, given her sadistic insistence on stocking Kent “till night, and all night too”, and her eagerness to extend the eye-gouging (“One side will mock another. Th’ other too!”). It is perhaps worth noting that if F1 Lear is indeed a revision of Q1, the reviser actually created the silent beat by removing “sir” from the end of the line. Similarly, Timon’s driving his false friends from the false banquet, perhaps by pelting them with stones (see 3.6.120), is registered not in the stage-directions but in the reference to their “taking [their] physic”, and perhaps in the silent beat of the preceding line:

(200)

Timon: Of man and beast the infinite malady
<Crust you> quite o|ver! <!>| <What, dost thou go|?
Soft, take thy physic first – thou too – and thou;

(Tim. 3.6.99)

A lighter blow is given by the officer who claps his hand on Antonio’s shoulder to arrest him, and a more welcome one in Cassius’ and Brutus’ hand-clasping and in King John’s dubbing of the Bastard:

(201)

Antonio: … You stand amaz’d;
<But be| of com|fort.
Second officer: <!>| Cóme, sir|, away|.

(TN 3.4.339)

Cassius: Good night|, my lord|.
Brutus: Good night|, good bro|ther <!>.

(JC 4.3.237)

King John: <Kneel thou> down Phi|lip, <!>| but rise| more great|:

(KJ 1.1.161)

It is possible that the silent beat in the following was supplied by the gardener’s demonstrative lopping off of a ‘superfluous branch’ (though how that might be done on the Globe stage is another question):
5. The Short Pentameter 2: Silent Beats

(202)

Gardener: Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have liv’d to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live; (R2 3.4.63)

The silent beat may cue some business with props, as when the aedile brandishes
the requested list of stooges, the Jeweller points to the ‘water’ (lustre) of his
jewel, Diomedes flourishes Troilus’ favour, or Edmund thrusts the hilt of his
sword towards Edgar:

(203) ►

Sicinius: Have you a catalogue / Of all the voices that we have procur’d,
<Set down| by th’ poll|? (Cor. 3.3.10)

Aedile: I have|; ’tis rea|dy. (Cor. 3.3.10)

Merchant: [Looking at the jewel] ’Tis a good form.
Jeweller: And rich|. <Here is> a wa|ter, look| ye <!>|. (Tim. 1.1.18)

Cressida: ’Twas one’s that lov’d me better than you will.
But, now| you have| it, take| it.
Diomedes: <!>| Whose was| it? (TC 5.2.90)

Edmund: Nay, send in time.
Albany: ^ Run, ^ run, Ó, run!
Edgar: Tb who, my lord? Who has the office? Send
Thy token of reprieve.
Edmund: Well thought| on! Take| my sword|. The cap|tain – <!>|
Give it the captain.
Albany: Haste thee for thy life. (KL 5.3.251)

Bassanio’s fateful opening of the leaden casket is marked by a rest:

(204) ►

Portia: Ó love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy, …
I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
For fear| I sur|feit.
Bassanio: <!>| What find| I here|? (MV 3.2.115)
In the following passage King Richard makes some conciliatory gesture towards the messenger he mistakenly struck – a hand on the shoulder, perhaps (it would seem a little odd to offer the purse quite so quickly):

(205)

**Messenger:** ... Buckingham's army is dispers'd and scatter'd;
*And he himself wand'red away alone,*
<No man| knows whither.

**King Richard:** <!> I cry thee mercy.
*There is my purse to cure that blow of thine.*

(R3 4.4.513)

Finally, the rest may cue a pointing to or indication of some object or person:

(206) ►

**Henry:** And there|upon| <give me> your daugh|ter <!>.

(H5 5.2.347)

**Lear:** *Death on my state! Wherefore*
<Should he| sit he|(ere <!>?)? This act| persuades|( me
*That this remotion of the Duke and her /Is practice only.*

(KL 2.3.113)

**Cleopatra:** *But there's no goodness in thy face, if Antony*
Be free| and health|ful – <!> | so tart| a fa|vour
*To trumpet such good tidings!*

(AC 2.5.38)

**Banquo:** *the heaven's breath*
Smith|ly he|ere <!> | No ju|tty, frieze |3
*Buttress, nor coign of vantage …*

(Mac. 1.6.6)

In (207), Horatio’s alarm (“O, where, my lord?”) makes more sense if the rest in Hamlet’s line cues a gesturing, pointing or turning towards the imaginary father:

(207) ►

**Hamlet:** My fa|ther – <!> | methinks| I see| my fa|ther.
**Horatio:** Ó, where, my lord?
**Hamlet:** In my mind’s eye, Horatio.

(Ham. 1.2.184)

3 There is an alternative line with initial jolt (“^ Smells| <wooing>ly here|; No ju|tty, frieze|,”), but a jolt between subject and predicate is inappropriate and seems unmotivated.
§5.2: Rests that Cue Expressive Gestures

A second function of the silent beat is to cue an expressive bodily gesture. Take Polonius’ ‘you’re-a-man-of-the-world, work-it-out-for-yourself’ shrug as he ekes out his list of suggested “slips” to Reynaldo:

(208) ►

Polonius: But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.

Reynaldo: As gaming, my lord?

Polonius: ^ Ay|, or drink|ing, fenc|ing, swear|ing, <!> |
<Quarrel>ling, dra|bbing – yÔu| may go| so far|. (Ham. 2.1.25)

A mock shrug will do as well as a real one: Henry IV shrugs in an ironic simulation of bafflement; Iago, questioned about Cassio’s honesty, just hints a fault, and hesitates dislike (Bob Hoskins, in the BBC Othello, shrugs on the rest); Gloucester shrugs provocingly in response to Lady Anne’s accusations; and Flavius mimics the embarrassed prevarications of Timon’s ungrateful parasites:4

(209) ►

Worcester: I have not sought the day of this dislike.

King: <You have| not sought| it? <!> | How comes| it, then|? (1H4 5.1.27)

Othello: <Is he| not ho|nest?

Iago: <!> | <Honest>, my lord|? (Oth. 3.3.103)

Lady Anne: … <Didst thou> not kill| this king|?

Gloucester: I grant| ye. <!> |

Lady Anne: Dost grant me, hedgehog? then, God grant me too
Thou mayst be damnëd for that wicked deed! (R3 1.2.101)

Flavius: They answer, in a joint and corp|rate voice,
That now they are at fall, want treasure, cannot
Do what they would, are sorry; you are hon|rable,

---

4 The first two examples were originally pointed out by George Wright (1988).
But yet| they could| have wish’d| – they know| not – <!>|’

Something hath been amiss – a noble nature
May catch a wrench – would all were well! – ’tis pity –

(Tim. 2.2.207)

The phrase “I know not” seems to be a natural attractor for the shrug: Timon’s parasites later have cause to shrug in genuine bafflement, and the post-homicidal Hamlet gives a mad shrug of apparent indifference:

(210) ►₁₁₇
<What does| his lord| ship mean|? / I know| not <!>|. (Tim. 2.2.207)

Hamlet: How now? a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!

Polonius: O, I am slain!

Queen: O me, what hast thou done?

Hamlet: ^ Nay|, I know| not. <!>| <Is it| the King|? (Ham. 3.4.25)

In Coriolanus, Menenius, recounting his somewhat perfunctory fable of the belly to the mutinous citizens, pauses with a teasing shrug before the punch-line, eliciting the First Citizen’s impatient query (for the rest after the First Citizen’s line, see below, §5.3)

(211) ►₁₁₈

Menenius: Unto the appetite and affection common
<Of [the whole] bo|dy. \ The be|lly an|swer’d – <!>|

First Citizen: Well, sir | what an| swer made| the be|lly <!>|? (Cor. 1.1.105)

Other possible gestures include the shudder or grimace:

(212) ►₁₁₉

Ophelia: As if he had been loosëd out of hell
To speak| of ho|rrors – <!>| he comes| before| me. (Ham. 2.1.81)

Claudius: O, my offence is rank! It smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t,
A bro|ther’s mur|der. <!>| <Pray can> I nòt|, (Ham. 3.3.38)

The sigh:

(213) ►₁₂₀

Portia: I must go in. Ay me! How weak a thing
The heart of woman is! Ó Brutus, <!>

The heavens speed thee in thine enterprise! (JC 2.4.40)

AEGEON: In Syracuse was I born, and wed
Unto a woman, happy but for me,
And by me,– <!> <had not our hap been bad>: (CE 1.1.38)

SECOND LORD: this her son / Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart,
And leave eighteen. Alas, poor Princess, <!> (Cym. 2.1.56)

PERCY: No, Percy, thou art dust, and food for – <!> [Dies.]
PRINCE: For worms, brave Percy. <!> Farewell, great heart! (1H4 F1 5.4.87)

CYMBELINE: … Heard you all this, her women?
LADIES: We did, so please your Highness.
CYMBELINE: <!> Mine eyes
Were not in fault, for she was beautiful (Cym. 5.5.62)

The sob (genuine or otherwise); here Antony attempts to “make his followers weep”, and seems to succeed later in the play with Octavian:

(214) ►

ANTONY: Haply you shall not see me more, or if,
A mangled shadow. <!> Perchance to-morrow
You’ll serve another master. (AC 4.2.27)

OCTAVIAN: … Look you sad, friends?
The gods rebuke me, <!> <but it is things
To wash the eyes of kings. (AC 5.1.27)

The gestural mimicry of a violent action:

(215) ►

LADY MACBETH: I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums

Alternatively we may jolt foot four and drag foot five for double emphasis (“And leave eighteen. Alas, ~ poor ~ Princess,”, but since it involves two catalexes rather than one, Occam’s Razor suggests that it is the less satisfactory solution.
And dash’d| the brains| out <!>| <had I| so sworn|  
*As you have done to this.* (Mac. F1 1.7.58)

The open-armed gesture of appeal:

(216) ▶ 123
Coriolanus: *Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,  
I’ll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,*  
Were you| in my| stead, <!>| would you| have heard|  
*A mother less? or granted less, Aufidius?* (Cor. 5.3.192)

Leontes: *Now, from the oracle*  
They will bring all, whose spiritual counsel had,  
Shall stop| or spur| me. <!>| Have [I done] well|?  
*(WT: 2.1.219)*

The open-armed gesture of bafflement:

(217) ▶ 124
Francisco: They vanish’d strangely <!>  
Sebastian: No matter, since|  
They have left their viands behind; for we have stomachs. (Tp. 3.3.40)

And the gesture of denial:

(218) ▶ 125
Caesar: <Where is he now|?  
Octavia: My lord|, in Athens.  
Caesar: <!>.  
*No, my most wrong’d sister: Cleopatra  
Hath nodded him to her.* (AC 3.6.64)

We also find the gesture of admonition (or perhaps a clip round the ear), used here to quiet an unruly servant:

(219) ▶ 126
Celia: I faint almost to death.  
Touchstone: *Holla, you clown!*  
Rosalind: <Peace, fool|; he’s not| thy kins|man. <!>|  
Corin: Who calls|? *(AYL 2.4.67)*
The Duke invites Othello to tell his story with an expansive gesture:

(220) ►127

Othello: I'll present / How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine.

Duke: <Say it>, Othello. (!) (Oth. 1.3.126)

A silent beat can cue a start of surprise:

(221) ►128

Volumnia: I kneel before thee, and improperly
Show duty, as mistaken all this while
Between the child and parent. [Kneels]

Coriolanus: What's this? Your knees to me? to your corrected son?

Desdemona: He hath commanded me to go to bed,
And bid me dismiss you.

Emilia: Dissmiss (me? (Oth. 4.3.14)

or a gesture of recognition (like the clapping of hand to forehead):

(222) ►129

Ulysses: They clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder,
As if his foot were on brave Hector's breast,
And great Troy shrining.

Achilles: I do believe it; For they pass'd by me "s misers do by beggars –

Lucentio: <Pardon>, swèet fa|ther.
Vincentio: <Lives my> swèet son? (TS 5.1.112)

or of dismissal (a finger-snap or its equivalent):

(223) ►130

Caesar: … Let the old ruffian know / I have many other ways to die; mean time,
<p Laugh at> his challenge. (!)

6 Alternatively, “<Pardon>, swèet fa|ther. / Lives my sweet~ son?”.
or exasperation (striking a surface or stamping):

(224) ►131

Othello: … Now, by heaven, / My blood begins my safer guides to rule …

\[\text{And be that is approv’d in this offence, …}\]

\[\text{Shall lose me.} \text{<!}|<\text{What! in} a town| of war|, …}\]

\[\text{To manage private and domestic quarrel?} \quad (Oth. 2.3.213)\]

Othello: The handkerchief!

Desdemona: A man that all his time

\[\text{Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,}\]

\[\text{Shàr’d dan|gers with| you –}\]

Othello: <!>| The hand|kerchief|! \quad (Oth. 3.4.95)

Lear: Deny to speak with me? They a’re sick? they a’re weary?

\[\text{They ha’ve tra|vell’d all| the night}? \text{Mère fe|tches – <!>|} \quad (KL 2.4.89)\]

or of emphasis:

(225) ►132

Hotspur: Send danger from the east unto the west,

\[\text{So honour cross it from the north to south,}\]

\[\text{And let| them grapp|le: <!>| the blood| more stirs|}\]

\[\text{To rouse a lion than to start a hare!} \quad (1H4 F1 1.3.197)\]

Isabella: Merciful heaven! / Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphürrous bolt

\[\text{Split’st the unwedgeable and gnarléd oak}\]

\[<\text{Than [the soft] myr|tle; <!>| but man|, pròud man|, …} \quad (MM 2.2.117)\]

A silent beat may cue a theatrical registration of dismay or alarm at being suddenly at a loss for an answer. For example, Desdemona is disconcerted by Othello’s odd remarks; Viola, embarrassed by Olivia’s declaration of love, breaks off in confusion; the conscience-tormented Second Murderer finds it hard to name his errand to the victim:

(226) ►133

Othello: For there’s a young and sweating devil here
That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
A frank one.

Desdemona: You may, indeed, say so;
For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart. (Oth. 3.4.44)

Olivia: But would you undertake another suit,
I had rather hear you to solicit that
Than music from the spheres.

Viola: Dear lady – (TN 3.1.110)

Clarence: Who sent you hither? Wherefore do you come?

Second Murderer: To, to –

Clarence: To murder?

Both Murderers: Ay, ay.

Clarence: You scarcely have the hearts to tell me so, (R3 1.4.172)

More benignly, Gonzalo muses on his hypothetical Arcadia (eked out, as we have seen, with hesitation jolts):

Gonzalo: Had I plantation of this isle, my lord –
... <And were the king on't, <*> <what would> I do? (Tp. 2.1.1.46)

Cleopatra’s messenger, now wary of the queen’s right hook, finds himself ambushed by a demand (“Guess at her years”) to which it would be hard to give a safe answer (to escape another smacking he needs to make Octavia young enough to be a plausible match for the “ne’er lust-wearied” Antony, but not younger than Cleopatra herself, “wrinkled deep in time”). The silent beat here perhaps registers his alarmed facial response to the situation, alarm followed almost immediately by an inspired answer, simultaneously true, pleasing and non-committal:

Cleopatra: The fellow has good judgment.

Charmian: Excellent.

Cleopatra: <Guess at> her years, I prithee.

Messenger: Madam, <*>

She was a widow –
CLEOPATRA: Widow? Charmian, bark. (AC 3.3.30)

Northumberland begins, awkwardly, a difficult attempt to pour oil on troubled (and dangerous) waters, though almost immediately cut off by the King with a peremptory vocative jolt:

(229) ► 136

Worcester: Our house, my sov’reign liege, little deserves
The scourgé of greatness to be us’d on it,
And that same greatness too which our own hands
Have holp| to make| so port|ly.

Northumberland: <!> | My lord| –

King: ^ Worces|ter, get| thee gone|; <for I| do see|

Danger and disobedience in thine eye. (1H4 1.3.14-5)

In the following example, Claudius and Hamlet are fencing with each other, each prefacing his response with a knowing gesture (eyebrow-raising, nodding) in order to ‘psych out’ the other, to imply that the speaker knows more than the other has suspected:7

(230) ► 137

Claudius: The barque is ready, and the wind at help,
Th’ associates tend, and everything is bent
For En|gland.

Hamlet: <!> | For En|gland?

Claudius: <!> | Áy, Ham| (let. (Ham. 4.3.46)

§5.3: The Deictic Rest

In addition to these mimetic and expressive applications of the silent beat, we also find a couple of interesting deictic uses, marking and drawing attention to features of the interaction between characters. One of these, for example, is to mark the end of a question, perhaps with a conventional head-tilt or some similar item of body language:

7 The other interpretive possibility is to expand England to three syllables in both cases. Trisyllabic England, however, occurs nowhere else in Shakespeare, and while we could easily imagine Hamlet mimicking Claudius’ unusual pronunciation, it’s hard to see why Claudius would be given this exotic pronunciation in the first place.
(231) ►

**Northumberland:** *My liege, old Gaunt commends him to your Majesty.*

**King Richard:** What says he <i>!</i>?  
**Northumberland:** Nay, no thing; all is said.  
  
**King Richard:** Shall I obtain it <i>!</i>?  
**Bolingbroke:** <i>Name it</i>, fair cou(sin.  
  
**Bishop of Ely:** <i>Where is</i> my lord | the Duke | of Gloucester <i>!</i>?  
  
**Gloucester:** … *O strange and fasten'd villain!*  
<i>Would he deny</i> his le|tter, said | he <i>!</i>?  
  
**Silvia:** *Servant, you are welcome to a worthless mistress.*  
**Proteus:** *I’ll die on him that says so but yourself:*  
**Silvia:** <i>That you are wel</i>come <i>!</i>?  
**Proteus:** That you are worth|less.  
  
**Martius:** *Where is the en’my? Are you lords o’ th’ field?*  
If not | why cease | you till | you are | so <i>!</i>?  
  
**Messenger:** *Fulvia* thy wife | is dead|.  
**Antony:** Where died | she <i>!</i>?  
  
**Cleopatra:** <i>Where is</i> he <i>!</i>?  
**Charmian:** <i>I did not see</i> him since|.  
  
**Lepidus:** *Of us must Pompey presently be sought,*  
Or else <i>he seeks</i> out us|.  
**Antony:** Where lies | he <i>!</i>?  
  
**Titus:** *Publius*, hòw now |? Hòw now |, my mas|ters <i>!</i>?  
  
**Richmond:** *Tell me*, hòw fares | our lo|ving mo|ther <i>!</i>?
Sometimes the silent beat comes after a supplementary or tag question:

(232)

Regan: What, did my father’s godson seek your life?
   <He whom| my fa|ther nam|d|, your Ed|gar <!|>|

Desdemona: Who’s there|? Otha|llo <!|>|

Othello: <Ay, Des|demo|(na

Like the jolt, the rest can mark an imperative, but with a supporting gesture. In King Richard’s case, the first injunction “leave me”, marked by a jolt, doesn’t seem to work, so the repetition is accompanied by an intensifying silent beat (perhaps an impatient wave of the hand):

(233) ►

King Richard: ^ Set it down. Is ink and paper ready?

Ratcliff: It is, my lord.

King Richard: Bid my guard watch; ^ leave me.

Ratcliff,

About the mid of night come to my tent
And help| to arm| me. <!|> <Leave me>, I say|.

York: I pray| you, un|cle, <!|> <give me> this da|(gger.

Ghost: <Think on> Lord Has|tings. <!|> Despair| and die|!

Guiderius: I do note / That grief and patience, rooted in him both,
   <Mingle> their spurs| toge|ther.

Arviragus: <!|> Gròw pa|(tience!
   And let the stinking elder, grief; untwine

The rest can also mark a vocative, specifically one involving a shift of addressee, possibly cuing a deictic turning of the head or body towards the new interlocutor:

(234) ►

Bolingbroke: Thanks, gen|tle un|cle. <!|> <Come, lords|, away|,

Stanley: My lord|, gòod mo|rrow; <!|> gòod mo|rrow, Cates|by.
Brabantio: [To Othello] I here do give thee that with all my heart
Which but thou hast already, with all my heart
<I would| keep from| thee.  [Turns to Desdemona]
<!>| For your| sake, je|(wel
I am glad at soul I have no other child,  (Oth. 1.3.195)

Othello: What! in a town of war, … / To manage private and domestic quarrel, …
’Tis monstrous. <!>| Iago, whom began’t|?8

Othello: I cry you mercy then; / I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with| Othello. [to Emilia] <!>| You, mistress,
That have the office opposed to Saint Peter …  (Oth. 4.2.90)

Antony: A good rebuke, / Which might have well become|d the best of men
To taunt| at slackness. <!>| Can|us, wē|
Will fight with him by sea.  (AC 3.7.27)

Prospero: their rising senses / Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
Their clearer reason. <!>| Ó good| Gonzalo,

Sicinius: if you bring not Martius, we’ll proceed
<In our first way|.

Menenius:  I’ll bring| him to| you.
[To the Senators.|<!>
Let me desire your company.  (Cor. 3.1.336)

Or a topic change:

(235)
Richmond: But tell| me, <!>| is young| Géorge Stanley living?

(R3 5.3.376)

Innogen: ^I| am sick| still; heart|-sick. <!>| Pisa|(n’o,
I’ll now taste of thy drug.  (Cym. 4.2.37)

Sometimes exits are punctuated by a silent beat:

8 Alternatively (and less interestingly) we could read the expanded form monstrëous, as in “Who cannot want| the thought|, how monstrous” (Mac. 3.6.8).
(236)

Martius: Your valor puts well forth. Pray follow. ![Exit]

(Cor. 1.1.251)

Innogen: I am bound to you.

Belarius: And shalt be ever. ![Exit Innogen]

(Cym. 4.2.46)

Brutus: Let’s … carry with us ears and eyes for th’ time,

But hearts for th’ event.

Sicinius: Have with you. ![Exit]

(Cor. 2.1.270)

More frequently entrances are accompanied by a deictic rest, perhaps a pointing gesture or a turning of the body towards the new arrival:

(237) ►141

Bolingbroke: Of much less value is my company

<Than your good words. But who comes here?>

[Enter Harry Percy]

(R2 2.3.20)

Bolingbroke: I know it, un(less) against my will.

[Enter Harry Percy]

(R2 3.3.19)

Bolingbroke: Evermore thanks, the exchequer of the poor;

Which, till my infant fortune comes to years,

[Enter Berkeley]

(R2 2.3.67)

Lady: How, my good name? or to report of you

<What I shall think is good? – The Princess>!

[Enter Innogen]

(Cym. 2.4.85)

Cleopatra: Seek him, and bring him hither. Where’s Alexas?

Alexas: Here, at your service. My lord approaches.

[Enter Antony with a Messenger]

(AC 1.2.86)
Aufidius: ^Hē| approaches. Yō| shall hear| him. <!>

[Enter Coriolanus, marching with drum and colours;]

(Cor. 5.6.69)

Coriolanus: Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow

<In [the same] time| ’tis made|? I will| not. <!>

[Enter, in mourning habits, Virgilia, etc.] (Cor. 5.3.21)

Cassio: I humbly thank you for’t. I never knew

A Flo|rentine| more kind| and ho|nest. <!>

[Enter Emilia] (Oth. F1 3.1.40)

Othello: Even then this forked plague is fated to us

<When we| do qui|cken. <!>| <Look where> she comes]:

[Re-enter Desdemona and Emilia.] (Oth. 3.3.277)

Sometimes the entrance-jolt and the start of surprise appear to be fused, as with Cleopatra’s first sight of the dying Antony:

(238) ►

Diomedes: Look out o’ th’ other side your monument;

His guard| have brought| him thi|ther.

[Enter [below], Antony, and the Guard [bearing him]]

Cleopatra:

<!| Ó sun|,

Burn the great sphere thou mov’st in! … (AC 4.15.9)

Another kind of rest is the interruption, where the silent beat involves the speaker breaking off in mid-sentence, as when the Jeweller breaks into the Osric-like verbosity of the Merchant’s praise of Timon with an intrusive gesture such as showing the jewel, or Gertrude interrupts her son’s intolerable tirade about Claudius by (perhaps) throwing up her hands:

(239) ►

Merchant: A most incomparable man; breath’d, as it were,

To an untirable and continue|tate goodness.

He passes –
Jeweller:  <!> I have a jewel here.\(^9\)  

**(Ham. 3.4.101)**

In the following example Gloucester interrupts Margaret’s curse to make it fall on her own head, though the structure of the following line, in which *Margaret* occupies the first three positions, suggests that the interruption is not vocal but gestural – perhaps a clap of the hands:

(240) ►\(^{144}\)

**Margaret:**  *Thou loathed issue of thy father’s loins,*  
Thou rag| of ho|nour, thou| detes|ted –

**Gloucester:**  <!>

<Marga>ret!

**Margaret:**  Ri|chard!

**Gloucester:**  Ha|?

**Margaret:**  I call| thee not|.

**(R3 1.3.232-3)**

And then there’s the absolutely final interruption:

(241) ►\(^{145}\)

**Hotspur:** Nó, Per|cy, thŏ| art dust|, and food| for – <!> | [Dies.]\(^{10}\)

**(1H4 5.4.86)**

Interruption can be self-interruption, under the pressure of emotion (in this case exasperation, perhaps manifested as a contemptuous flicking of the letter):

(242) ►\(^{146}\)

**Hotspur:**  Sick now? droop now? This sickness doth infect

---

\(^9\) Most editions print a full stop after *passes*, as in F1, but while the verb could be used intransitively to mean ‘excels’, “He passes.” seems far too laconic for this Osric-like speaker when he could say something like “He passes the extolment of all virtues, / And …”).

\(^{10}\) Editors usually follow the earliest texts in placing “No, Percy, thou art dust” after “Lies on my tongue”, and stranding “and food for” as a fragment. My arrangement makes better sense to me, with an expressive pause after “Lies on my tongue” and the grunt or death-rattle expressed as the final rest of Hotspur’s final line.
The very life-blood of our enterprise …
He writes me here that inward sickness – <!>
And that his friends by deputation could not
So soon be drawn … 

(1H4 4.1.31)

Sometimes where the interruption is caused by an entrance it leaves a word unspoken: Macbeth, for example, unwilling to be caught in hesitant soliloquy by his wife, breaks off in mid-sentence, leaving the word side unsaid:

(243) ►

Macbeth: I have no spur / … but only / Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself
And falls on th’ o|ther – <!> | [Enter LADY MACBETH.]
How now|? What news|? 

(Mac. 1.7.28)

Similarly Iago, not wanting Othello to hear him gossiping about him, breaks off before uttering the name Desdemona:

(244)

Iago: He’s married. / Cassio: To who?
Iago: <Marry>, to – <!> | [Enter OTHELLO]
Côme, cap|tain, will| you go|? 

(Oth. 1.2.53)

§5.4: Multiple Lacunae

We can see the short pentameter at work in the following passage, in which Emilia registers for the first time the appalling truth about her husband’s slander of Desdemona. It contains four occurrences of the phrase “my husband”, all of which are placed by their prosodic and informational contexts in different relations to the metre. The first (l.138) is simply a puzzled query (“Why mention him? What has he got to do with all this?”); the second (l.142) repeats that query after a silent beat that signifies a kind of stunned double-take (the penny is beginning to drop). The third utterance (l.145) has an incredulous, horrified accent on both words in the phrase; by the fourth (l.148) accentuation has returned to normal as she desperately seeks a contradiction from Othello (whose exasperation provides the jolts in this line):

(245) ►

Othello: <Cass’o> did top| her; ask| thy hus|band else|.
	<O, I> were damn’d| beneath all depth| in hell|,
To this extremity. Thy husband knew it all.

Emilia: My husband?

Othello: Thy husband.

Emilia: That she was false to wed.

Othello: Ay, with Cassius. Had she been true, if heaven would make me such another world of one entire and perfect chrysolite, I'd not have sold her for it.

Emilia: My husband?

Othello: Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first. An honest man he is, and hates the slime that sticks on filthy deeds.

Emilia: My husband say she was false!

Othello: He, woman; I say thy husband. Dost understand the word? My friend, thy husband honest, honest I am (go).

(Oth. 5.2.136–54)

I have provided lots of examples of lacunae in action because I wish to show that they represent not sports or flukes or compositorial botching but rather a systematic pattern of compositional choice on Shakespeare’s part. Nevertheless, they remain rare in his verse because they are parasitic upon the normative syllabic regulation of the verse; too many of them would undermine our sense of the decasyllabic norm against which they must be perceived.

Some writers for whom all lacunae are merely pauses have imagined whole strings of them padding out short verses into pentameters, as though one could have a line like: “Ó Cassius, if you could! ^ <!> ^ <!>” (JC 1.3.140). But while the short line doubtless indicates a hesitation on Cinna’s part here, such a precise sequence of lacunae could not be communicated by an actor; at most it would be possible in theory to have a single silent foot composed of a jolt and a gestural silent beat, but this is not an option that Shakespeare seems to avail himself of; with one possible exception, the rest here expressed by a gesture of bafflement:

11 See, for example, Sicherman (1984).
Hamlet: For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause; \^<!> <there’s the> respect
That makes calamity of so long life:

(247)
To be|, or not| t\^ be, <!> <that is> the ques\{tion:
<Whether> ’tis no|bler <!> in th\^ mind| to su\{fer
The slings| and a\|rows <!> of outra|geous for\{tune

(246) Shakespeare avoids this for the same reason, perhaps, that he uses lacunae sparingly: to avoid undermining the code that reveals his metrical intentions by introducing too much play and laxity into the system. By the same token, if we want to read that code accurately we need to follow Occam’s Razor, and not introduce lacunae unless there is a genuine gap in the syllabic structure of the verse. The following scansion, in which silent beats substitute for weak beats, are perverse, in that in none of these verses has Shakespeare signalled the need for a rest, and in each case the rest produces extrametrical syllables:

(247)
6. Other Kinds of Verse in the Plays

“Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
The open ear of youth doth always listen”

(Richard II, 2.1.19-20)

Although most of the verse in the plays is unrhymed iambic pentameter, there is a surprising variety of other kinds of spoken verse (I do not deal here with the rhythm of the songs, since this is for the most part governed by their musical settings). This falls into two categories: isolated non-pentameter iambic lines scattered through the blank verse (Shakespeare seems to have seen such lines as a kind of metrical variation within blank verse) and more markedly distinctive passages of rhyming verse, ranging from couplets to whole scenes.

§6.1: Short and Long Lines in Blank Verse

§6.1.1: Short Lines

A short verse is a non-pentameter with fewer than ten available syllables occurring in a passage of blank verse. They are quite common in Shakespeare’s mid to late style, in part because, as George Wright says, they make the “dialogue sound more convincing” (1988, 137). Isolated tetrameters are fairly rare, perhaps because they run the risk of sounding like failed pentameters, but also because they disrupt the heuristic process of scansion, which instructs us to look for pentameters where possible:

---

1 All syllables in a verse, including half-syllables, up to and including the last independent, are ‘available’.
Gaunt: There is no virtue like necessity.

<Think not> the King| did ba|nish thee|,

But thou the King.

(R2 1.3.279)

Trimeters or three-foot verses, on the other hand, go well with pentameters (as illustrated in the odes of Collins and Keats), and so tend to constitute the bulk of short verses; we also occasionally find the dimeter or two-foot verse, and other fragments. In the first scene of King Lear, the point at which Cordelia’s inability to co-operate causes Lear’s ceremonial catechism of his daughters to erupt into open-ended drama is marked by the progressive dissolution of pentameter into dimeter and then into smaller fragments:

Lear: Now, our joy,

Although our last and least, to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interess’d, what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cordelia: <Nothing>, my lord|.

Lear: Nothing?

Cordelia: Nothing.

(KL 1.1.82–9)

For a discussion of the relation between short lines and pausing, see §3.1.

§6.1.2: Long Lines (Alexandrines)

Between 0 (MND) and 2.3% (MM) of the lines in a play will be alexandrines, or six-foot iambic lines; for technical reasons alexandrines have eight beats, the fourth and eighth being silent (see §1.5.3). Lear uses them in the first scene of the play, for example, to swell out his wounded dignity, like a frill-necked lizard making itself appear bigger (and more threatening) than it is:

Lear: I do invest you jointly with my power,

Pre-eminence, and all the large effects

That troop| with ma|jesty|, <!> Ourselves|, by month| ly course|, <!>

With reservation of an hundred knights,

By you to be sustain’d, shall our abode
The alexandrine differs fundamentally from the pentameter in that it requires a break (known as an **obligatory caesura**) after the third beat to accommodate the medial rest, so that the line can never be ‘single-moulded’. It is interspersed throughout the blank verse, and is it is rare to find two alexandrines together; one sustained passage of particular interest, however, is the conclusion to the wooing of Lady Anne in *Richard III*. Earlier in the scene their contest of wit is represented through stichomythia (3.2.2), and this scene superficially resembles a reprise of this form in a different metre. What it actually represents, however, is the opposite of the complete separation suggested by stichomythia, in that in each exchange the two combine to construct an alexandrine between them, their co-operative connectedness underscored by hemistich-final semantic and phonetic ties (*heart/tongue, false/true, hereafter/hope, sword/made*). It marks the beginning of Anne’s capitulation, her acceptance of Richard, expressed in this very passage in her shift from the contemptuous *thy* to the more respectful *your*:

(251) ▶

Anne:

> I would| I knew| thy heart|. <!>  
> I fear| me both| are false|. <!>  
> Well, well|, <put up| your sword|. <!>  
> <That shall> you know| hereafter| (ter. <!>  
> Àll men|, I hope|, live so|. <!>

Richard:

> ’Tis figured| in my tongue|. <!>  
> Then never man| was true|. <!>  
> <Say, then|, my peace| is made|. <!>  
> But shall| I live| in hope|? <!>  
> Vouchsafe| to wear| this ring|. <!>

(R3 1.2.192–201)

§6.2: **Rhymed Verse**

The sole medium for English drama before the reign of Elizabeth was rhymed verse, and when Shakespeare first began to write for the stage blank verse was still a relatively new vehicle. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that early in his career Shakespeare used quite a lot of rhyme (over 40% of the lines in *Love’s Labours Lost* are rhymed, for example), though the proportion decreased markedly as his career developed, down to less than 1% in *Coriolanus*. Differences are not due solely to Shakespeare’s development, however: comedies and romances, for example, will tend to have more rhyme in them than tragedies and histories.
§6.2.1: The Pentameter Couplet

Pentameter couplets (rhymed pairs of lines) are the most common alternative verse-form in the plays, either as isolates or in extended passages. As pentameters they are, of course, subject to all the normal variations discussed in chapters 2 and 3 (but not those of chapters 4 and 5).

The most familiar use of the isolated pentameter couplet is to act as a kind of punctuational device, indicating the end of a scene. Though the frequency of this device declines during Shakespeare’s artistic development, it can be found in both the earliest and the latest plays:

(252)

Egeon: Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend,
But to procrastinate his liveless end. [Exeunt] (CE 1.1.157-8)

Ariel: Prospero my lord shall know what I have done.
So, King, go safely on to seek thy son. [Exeunt] (Tp. 2.1.327-8)

Hamlet: My father’s spirt – in arms! All is not well.
I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes. [Exit]
(Ham. 1.2.254-7)

In the last example rhyme serves a double turn, in also pointing a sententia – a pithy generalising maxim that relates the particular action of the drama to some supposedly universal truth. Since the habit of inserting sententiae seems to derive from Seneca, sententious couplets tend to be commonest in the tragedies:

(253)

Lady Macbeth: Nought’s had, all’s spent,
Where our desire is got without content;
’Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (Mac. 3.2.5-8)

Couplet dialogues where the couplets (and even the lines) are shared are sometimes used to suggest the quick cut-and-thrust of witty exchange:
6. Other Kinds of Verse in the Plays

(254)

Berowne: <White-handed mistress, one sweet word> with thēe.
Princess: <Honey>, and milk, and sugar: there is three. ...
Berowne: One word in secret.
Princess: Let it not be sweet.
Berowne: Thou griev'st my gall.
Princess: Gall! bitter.
Berowne: Therefore meet.

(LLL 5.2.229-38)

Sustained couplet passages, being more obviously artificial than blank verse, function as a distancing mechanism, where Shakespeare wants to preclude a close emotional engagement with the characters. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, wouldn’t work in quite the same farcical way if we were disposed to take the lovers’ problems seriously, and so the language seeks to obviate our emotional involvement through a combination of highly formal elements: rhyme and stichomythia (together with a degree of grammatical parallelism, or ‘isocolon’):

(255)  

Helena: Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,  
    The rest I'd give to be to you translated.  
    O, teach me how you look, and with what art  
    You sway the motion of Demetrius’ heart!  
Hermia: I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.  
Helena: O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!  
Hermia: I give him curses, yet he gives me love.  
Helena: O that my prayers could such affection move!  
Hermia: The more I hate, the more he follows me.  
Helena: The more I love, the more he hateth me.  
Hermia: His folly, Helena, ’s no fault of mine.  
Helena: None, but your beauty; would that fault were mine!

(MND 1.1.190-201)

Something similar obtains in the following passage from *Twelfth Night*, expressing Olivia’s farcical attachment to Viola/Cesario:
Olivia: A murderous guilt shows not itself more soon
Than love that would seem hid: love’s night is noon. –
Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth, and every thing,
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide. (TN 3.2.153-160)

Rhymed pentameter can also function as a marker of artificiality itself, as in the play-within-the play in Hamlet, where it serve to indicate the ‘scriptedness’ of The Mousetrap as opposed to the represented spontaneity of the blank verse that surrounds it:

Player King: Full thirty times hath Phoebus’ cart gone round
Neptune’s salt wash and Tellus’ orbèd ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrow’d sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands,
Unite commutual in most sacred bands. (Ham. 3.2.154-9)

The question of how much weight to give the rhyming word is decided by the degree of endstopping built into the verse by Shakespeare; in these heavily endstopped examples it would be hard to avoid coming down heavily on the rhyme, whereas in the following example from the masque in The Tempest, the first line of each couplet is run on, encouraging a more fluid delivery, couplet by couplet, with less emphasis on the rhymes:

Ceres: Hail, many-coloured messenger, that ne’er # →
Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter; †
Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flow’rs # →
Diffusest honey drops, refreshing show’rs; †
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown # →
My bosky acres and my unshrubb’d down, †
Rich scarf to my proud earth-why hath thy Queen # →
Summon’d me hither to this short-grass’d green? † (Tp. 4.1.75-82)
§6.2.2: The Pentameter Stanza

A stanza is a group of three or more lines that rhyme in a particular pattern. In CE Shakespeare experiments with pentameter quatrains (rhyming abab) as a subtler form of distancing mechanism:

(259)

Luciana: And may it be that you have quite forgot

A husband’s office? Shall, Antipholus

E’en in the spring of love, thy love-springs rot?

Shall love, in building, grow so ruinous?

If you did wed my sister for her wealth,

Then for her wealth’s sake use her with more kindness:

Or, if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth,

Muffle your false love with some show of blindness: (CE 3.2.1-8)

RJ famously makes use of the sonnet – the archetypal love-poem – in various ways, most memorably as a way of framing and holding the lovers’ first meeting. The sonnet (technically a sonetto caudato, or ‘sonnet with a tail’) here acts as a kind of synecdoche of their relationship, book-ended as it is by antithetical threats: Tybalt’s mindless ferocity and the Nurse’s banal domesticity. The movement of the sonnet towards its inevitable conclusion prefigures in an accelerated way the development of their own connectedness: at first they merely share the octave, one quatrain each; then they begin to share pairs of lines, and end by sharing a single line:

(260) ►153

Tybalt: I will withdraw; but this intrusion shall,

Now see ming sweet, convert to bitter gall. Exit.

Romeo: If I profane with my unworn th' est hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims’ hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers’ kiss.

Romeo: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
Juliet: Áy, pil|grim, lips| that thèy| must use| in pray’r|.
Romeo: <Ó, then|, dèar saint|, lèt lips| dò what| hànds do|!
They pray|; <grant thou>, lest faith| <turn to> despair|.
Juliet: <Saints do> not move|, though grant| for pra|yers’ sake|.
Romeo: Then move| not while| my pray’r’s| effect| I take|.
<Thus from> my lips|, by thine| my sin| is purg’d|.
Kisses her.
Juliet: <Then have| my lips| the sin| that thèy| have took|.
Romeo: <Sin from> my lips|? Ó tres|pass sweet|ly urg’d|!
<Give me> my sin| again|.
Kisses her.
Nurse: <Madam>, your mo|ther craves| a word| with yàu|.
(RJ 1.5.91-111)2

§6.2.3: Rhymed Alexandrines

The alexandrine (§6.1.2) is a clunky line in English because of the obligatory medial caesura that accommodates the necessary rest, and that clunkiness becomes highly noticeable in an extended passage. For this reason rhyming alexandrines only ever appear in Shakespeare as a satire on wooden versifying, as in the case of the pageant of the Nine Worthies in Love’s Labours Lost:

(261)

Nathaniel: <When in> the world| I liv’d|, <!> <I was| the world’s|
comman|der; <!>
By east|, wést, north|, and south|, <!> I spread| my con|qu’ring might|.
My scut|cheon plain| declares| <!> that I| am A|lisan|der – <!>

(LLL 5.2.562-4)

§6.2.4: The Septenary or ‘Fourteener’ (‘Iambic Heptameter’)

The septenary (a seven-foot iambic verse followed by a rest or a silent foot, printed either as one or as two typographic lines) was much more widely used – it was the staple metre of old-fashioned morality plays like A lamentable tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth, conteyning the life of Cambises king of Percia (1569) – but by the 1590s was considered old hat and suitable only for parodies (such as The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby), or for

---

2 I have scanned this passage to illustrate the difference between a somewhat agitated Romeo, with six obligatory switches and a harsh mapping, and a much more composed Juliet, with just one obligatory switch.
folk poetry. Shakespeare uses it in *Cymbeline* to suggest the archaic voice of Posthumus’ dead father, speaking from the tomb:

(262)

> Hath my poor boy done aught but well, Whose face I never saw? !
> I died whilst in the womb he stay’d Atten[ding na|ture’s law], !
> Whose father then (as men report ‘Thou orphans’ father art)
> Thou shouldst have been, and shielded him From this earth-vexing smart.

(*Cym*. 5.4.35–42)

More commonly, however, the form is used with parodic intention, to mock (for example) the pedantically inept versifying of Holofernes’ extempore effusion in *Loves’ Labours Lost*, with its heavy-handed alliteration and painfully elaborated puns:

(263)

> The prey[ful Prin|cess pierc’d| and prick’d] a pre|tty plea|sing pri|cket; !
> <Some say] a sore|, but not| a sore|, till now| m[a]de sore| with shoo|ting. !
> The dogs did yell; put *el to sore*, then sorel jumps from thicket,
> Or pricket sore, or else sorel; the people fall a-hooting.
> If sore be sore, then L to sore makes fifty sores o’ sorel.
> Of one sore I an hundred make by adding but one *more* L. (*LLL* 4.2.56–61)

Even-handedly, Shakespeare also uses the form to poke gentle fun at the amateur theatricals of those that “never laboured in their brains till now”; Pompey’s speech in the pageant of the Nine Worthies is largely in septenary, as is Bottom’s death-agony as Pyramus:

(264)

> Cóme, tears|, confound|; / Oút, sword|, and wound| / The pap| of Py|ramüs|; !
> <Ay, that> lèft pap|, / Where heart| doth hop| / <Thus die| I, thus|, thús, thús|.
> Now am I dead, / Now am I fled; / My soul is in the sky.
> Tongue, lose thy light; / Moon, take thy flight. / Now die, die, die, die, die.

(*MND* 5.1.295–306)

Given the parodic nature of such verse it would be difficult to over-emphasise the metre in performance.
§6.2.5: The Iambic Tetrameter Couplet

Occasionally we find in the plays a four-beat rhyming couplet, usually used for what might be called ‘ritual utterance’: spells, incantations, and extradiegetic matter such as prologues and epilogues, where the actor steps out of his or her role to address the audience:

(265)

Upon the corner of the moon,
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;
I’ll catch it ere it come to ground.
And that, distilled by magic sleights
Shall raise such artificial sprites
<As by the strength> of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion. ((Mac. 3.5.23-9))

This example is atypical, however, because it represents a four-foot (tetrameter) couplet, which scans (less a foot) very much like the pentameter, with the same metrical and prosodic variations:

(266)

<And, which is worse>, <all you> have done
The close contriver [of all] harms, ((Mac. 3.5.10, 3.5.7))

This footed four-beat form tends to be found in parts of the canon that are usually ascribed to other writers (the Hecate scenes in Macbeth, for example, or the Gower sections of Pericles).

§6.2.6: The Four-beat Heptasyllabic Couplet

Shakespeare’s typical ritual verse, a four-beat heptasyllabic couplet, is much more clearly distinguished from pentameter than the tetrameter in that it is not footed, which means that there is no metrical variation within the line; no reversals or swaps (though tails are, of course, possible: “1Double, 2double, 3toil and 4trou(ble”). The great majority of lines, however, have seven syllables, every odd-numbered one being a beat: Shakespeare neatly precludes the possibility of footedness by combining an even number of beats with an odd number of syllables.
This might seem a trivial difference but the effects are profound: it is the capacity of the beat to slide around in the grid of syllable-positions that gives footed metre like the pentameter its lively naturalistic complexity. When the placing of beats is fixed in relation to the grid it produces a heavy insistent sing-song rhythmicality that distorts natural speech-patterns in favour of the rigid metrical scheme:

(267) ▶

Third witch: 1Finger 2of birth-3strangled 4babe
1Ditch-de2liver’d 3by a 4drab
(Mac. 4.1.30)

First witch: 1Pour in 2sow’s blood 3that hath 4eaten
1Her nine 2farrow; 3grease that’s 4sweaten
(Mac. 4.1.65)

Puck: 1When thou 2wak’st, let 3love for4bid
1Sleep his 2seat on 3thy eye4lid.
(MND 2.2.81)

Ariel: (Be1fore you 2can say 3’come’ and 4‘go’,
1And breathe 2twice, and 3cry ‘so, 4so’,
(Tp. 4.1.45)

Unfooted verse tends towards chantably regular timing. This allows choral speaking (virtually impossible with pentameter) and makes it peculiarly appropriate to the eldritch other-worldly anonymity of the triune Weird Sisters, who speak in incantation and whose conversations are more like infernal liturgies:

(268) ▶

First witch: 1When shall 2we three 3meet a4gain?
In 1thunder, 2lightning, 3or in 4rain?
Second witch: 1When the 2hurly-3burly’s 4done,
1When the 2battle’s 3lost and 4won.
Third witch: 1That will 2be ere th3set of 4sun.
First witch: 1Where the 2place?
Second witch: 1U3pon the 4heath.
Third witch: 1There to 2meet with –3<!> Mac4beth.  (Mac. 1.1.1-6; dash mine)

As the last line shows, the metre employs (though rarely) the silent beat (see (§1.5.3): here, violently intruding at a flaw (not possible in iambic pentameter) it produces a portentous pause before the revelation of their victim’s name (recall
that in simple metre no gesture is required to mark a silent beat, only timing).
It also uses occasional catalexis (usually a drag in position 6):

(269) ►
1Toad, that under cold ~ stone  
2Trip we after night’s ~ shade.  
3Swifter than the moon’s ~ sphere;  
(Mac. 4.1.6)  
(MND 4.1.96)  
(MND 2.1.7)

The metrical rigidity is appropriate to a certain kind of heavy didacticism:

(270) ►
1All that glisters is not gold,  
2Often have you heard that told;  
3Many a man his life hath sold  
4But my outside to be held.  
(MV 2.7.65-8)

It is also useful to distinguish extradiegetic verse such as epilogues:

(271) ►
1Now the hungry lion roars,  
2And the wolf howls the moon;  
3Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,  
4All with weary task for done.  
(MND 5.1.371-4)

1Now my charms are all o’er thrown,  
1And what strength I have’s mine own,  
1Which is most faint. Now ’tis true,  
1I must be here confin’d by you,  
(Tp. Epil. 1-4)

The masque in The Tempest uses a variation with an obligatory tail:

(272) ►
1Honour, riches, marriage-blessing,  
1Long con-tinuance, and in-creasing,  
1Hourly joys be still upon you,  
1Juno sings her blessings on you.  
(Tp. 4.1.106-9)
§6.2.7: Doggerel

Before the triumph of the pentameter in the 1580s, most English drama was written in doggerel, by which I mean verse with a fixed number of beats per line (usually four or eight) and a variable number of syllables:

(273)

1Many a 2mile have I 3walked, 4<!> di5verse and 6sundry 7ways, 8<!>
And 1many a 2good man’s 3house 4<!> have I 5been at 6in my 7days 8<!>
1Many a 2gossip’s 3cup 4<!> in 5my time 6have I 7tasted 8<!>
And 1many a 2broach and 3spit, 4<!> have 5I both 6turned and 7basted 8<!>
(Gammer Gurton’s Needle [1575], 1.1.1-4)

Because such verse lacks the foot-structure of pentameter it is often hard to know how to scan it, or even whether it is meant to be eight-beat or four-beat; the eight-beat speech (above) that opens the play, for example, modulates randomly in and out of a four-beat mode:

(274)

1Sighing and 2sobbing they 3weep and they 4wail
I 1marvel in my 2mind, what the 3devil they 4wail (GGN 1.1.13-14)

Such doggerel can occasionally be found in Shakespeare’s earliest comedies, where it can be seen as part of the exuberant linguistic playfulness that characterises CE and LLL in particular, though he seems to have abandoned it after LLL, except for specific uses like the Fool’s prophecy in Lear. In CE 3.1, for example, the urbane blank verse with which the scene opens shifts into six-beat doggerel couplets with the first speech of Dromio of Ephesus and remains in that form throughout the farcical episode of Antipholus’ being locked out of his own home, returning to blank verse only after Dromio’s exit to fetch a crowbar at line 84 (the scansion here is only my suggestion):

(275) ▶

Antipholus E.: But, 1soft, my 2door is 3lock’d; 4<!> go 5bid them 6let us 7in. 8<!>
Dromio E.: 1Maud, 2Bridget, 3Marian, 4<!> 5Cicely, 6Gillian, 7Ginn! 8<!>
Dromio S.: [Within] 1Mome, 2malt-horse, 3capon, 4<!> 5coxcomb, 6idiot, 7patch! 8<!>
Either 1get thee 2from the 3door, 4<!> or 5sit 6down at the 7hatch. 8<!>
1Dost thou 2conjure for 3wenches, 4<!> that thou 5call’st for 6such 7store, 8<!>
When 1one is 2one too 3many? 4<!> Go 5get thee 6from the 7door. 8<!>

(CE 3.1.30-35)

It has been suggested that the way in which doggerel makes everyone sound much the same intensifies that confusion of identity that lies at the heart of the play (see O’Donnell 1997). The plot of CE is based on the comedies of Plautus, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the earliest attempts to write Plautine comedy in English (such as Nicholas Udall’s Rafe Royster Doyster [1553]) were written in doggerel.

Doggerel is not confined, however, to low-life or farcical situations: a four-beat doggerel couplet is occasionally used for wit-contests among the French courtiers in LLL:

(276)

Boyet: I was as 1willing to 2grapple as 3he was to 4board.
Katharine: 1Two hot sheeps, 2marry!
Boyet: And 3wherefore not 4ships?
No 1sheep, sweet 2lamb, unless we 3feed on your 4lips.
Katharine: You 1sheep and I 2pasture: shall that 3finish the 4jest?
Boyet: So you grant 1pasture for 2me. [Offering to kiss her]
Katharine: Not 3so, gentle 4beast;
My 1lips are no 2common, though 3several they 4be.
Boyet: Be1longing to 2whom?
Katharine: To my 3fortunes and 4me. (LLL 2.1.218-24)

It may be that in (276) Shakespeare was seeking the effect of witty extempore versifying, but it is a clumsy form in which to represent elegant badinage. As this example shows, there is no point in trying too hard to get doggerel ‘right’, not only because there is often no right reading, but also because its clumsiness is part of its comic appeal: trying to perfect the speaking of doggerel is like combing a fright wig – not only pointless (and perhaps impossible) but counterproductive.
7. Taking it Further: Metrical Analysis

“That would be scann’d” (Hamlet, 3.3.75)

§7.1: What is Scansion (and Why is it Useful)?

Scansion is the explicit metrical analysis of a verse, something that most of the time you should not find necessary if you have worked your way through this book. As with any cognitive ability, once you’ve learned how to do it the processing tends to take place automatically, below the threshold of consciousness. Once you’ve learned how to dance or to drive, for example, you’re not constantly thinking to yourself “which foot do I move next, and where do I put it?” The analytical process described here, therefore, is only for those odd lines that defeat the rapid intuitive process of forward guesswork that usually works very well. The notation we have been using so far in the book is a descriptive system for representing scansion that have already been made, rather than a heuristic tool for discovering them. For proper analytical or investigative scansion we require a more explicit system that describes separately (and relates) the prosodic structure of the verse and the metrical pattern of the line, which means such scansion must be – cumbersomely – three-tiered: text, prosody and metre.

§7.2: Prosodic Politics: Independence, Domination and Liberation

The first task in metrical analysis is to mark up the prosodic structure of the verse, in terms of the categories of syllables described in Chapter 1 (A-, B- and O-), not forgetting to tag half-syllables (with an \( \ddot{o} \)). Before we can scan a verse to work out what metrical lines might or might not emerge from it, we need to understand what might be called its prosodic politics – that is, the way syllables
exert power over their neighbours to affect the possible placement of beats; this depends on the strength and connectedness of syllables. A syllable capable of carrying a beat (A, B, O, O) is called an ‘independent’. Since a metrical pentameter line requires five beats, a verse must have at least five independents to produce a metrical line. The threat to a weak syllable’s independence is a neighbouring major stress, and the more closely connected they are, the greater the threat. A weak syllable will be dominated by a contiguous strong (A- or B-) syllable, but not by an adjacent one (i.e., where a crack intervenes—see §1.3.2): a dominated weak syllable is represented in the prosodic base by a lowercase ‘o’, with a line joining it to the dominating syllable. A weak syllable will also be protected by a following crack: in “the messengers # sent from Rome”, the last syllable of “messengers” remains independent. In the same way, a minor (B) syllable will be dominated by a neighbouring A-syllable unless it is protected by an intervening cut. (See Table in §7.2.2 for a full account of these prosodic politics.)

We can indicate domination graphically by putting the ‘O’ of the dominated in lowercase and connecting it to the dominating A-syllable (the ‘dominant’, for short). If we take the word ‘deceptive’ (o-A-o) or the phrase ‘the water’ (o-A-o) or ‘between us’ (o-B-o), in each case the central strong syllable dominates the unprotected weak syllables on either side, and thus prevents each of them from carrying a beat. The same is true of the sentence ‘I love you’ (o-A-o), because personal pronouns function (effectively) as affixes or ‘clitics’ of the verb. Subordinated stresses dominate joined weak syllables in the same word: “immense heights” (o-a-A), “Nicole left” (o-a-A). Some examples of the domination of a minor syllable: “between jobs” (b-A), “lamp-post” (A-b).

We then attempt to relate this prosodic base, syllable by syllable, to one of the metrical templates (§2.2); if we find we have to map a dominated o-syllable onto an S-position, the verse is unmetrical). Much of the time the process is pretty straightforward:

(277)

And let my liver rather heat with wine  

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
\text{o-} & \text{---A} & \text{o-} & \text{---A-o} & \text{A} & \text{o-} & \text{---A} \\
\text{w-} & \text{---S} & \text{w-} & \text{---S} & \text{w-} & \text{---S} & \text{w-} & \text{---S}
\end{array}
\]

prosodic base

metrical template

Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{A-} & \text{o-} & \text{---A} & \text{o-} & \text{---o} & \text{O} & \text{o-} & \text{---A-o} & \text{A} \\
\text{S-} & \text{---w} & \text{w-} & \text{---S} & \text{w-} & \text{---S} & \text{w} & \text{S} & \text{w-} & \text{---S}
\end{array}
\]

(MV 1.1.81)  

(MND 1.1.143)
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play. \( (H5\ 1.0.34) \)

\[
\begin{array}{cc}
A---\circ \ o--A & A---\circ \ o--A \ \ o----A \\
S----w \ w--S & S----w \ w--S \ \ w----S
\end{array}
\]

§7.2.1: Inhibition

Where an unstressed or O-syllable is adjacent to a preceding fully stressed major (A) or minor (B) syllable it ceases to be fully independent and is ‘inhibited’: “sing # in the shower” (A-Ō o-A-ō); subordinate major or ‘a’-syllables inhibit contiguous weak syllables: “the old dog” (Ō-a-A). An inhibited syllable is so called because readers will refrain from placing a beat on it (except where it is unavoidable) in all but the most artificial of performance-styles. Thus Ō-syllables must be matched with either W- or w-slots in the template; note that in the case of trisyllabic ‘descending’ compounds (AbO) like grandmother, the final syllable is not influenced:

(278)

\[
\begin{array}{cc}
\text{And faire Queene Isabel, his Grandmother,} \quad (H5\ 1.2.81) \\
O\ A & a----A-ō\ 0 \ o----A----b--O \\
W\ S & w\ S \ w\ S \ w\ S
\end{array}
\]

§7.2.2: Table of Prosodic Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of</th>
<th>Within word</th>
<th>Within phrase (joined or contiguous)</th>
<th>Within tone-unit (adjacent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>A subordinates A: \old\ mán \ a----A \ \john's\ hât \ a------A</td>
<td>A subordinates A if they are in immediate construction: \john\ #\ lèft \ a--------A \ lèave\ #\ nów \ a--------A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table of Prosodic Politics: Influence of stresses on neighbouring syllables not separated by a cut
## 2. On minor (B-) syllables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A dominates B:</th>
<th>A dominates B:</th>
<th>No effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><strong>Housewife</strong></td>
<td><em>between + jobs</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A----b</em></td>
<td><em>b-----A</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td><em>a has no effect on B:</em></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>between + two worlds</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>o---B a--A</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 3. On unstressed or weak (O-) syllables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A dominates O:</th>
<th>A inhibits following O:</th>
<th>A has no effect on preceding O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><strong>defend</strong></td>
<td><em>sleep # in the subway</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>o-A</em></td>
<td><em>A----Ô</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>fighter</strong></td>
<td><em>A--o</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td><strong>between</strong></td>
<td><em>beautiful + kangaroos</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>o---B</em></td>
<td><em>o-------B</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>after</strong></td>
<td><em>between + us</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>B-----o</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td><strong>a dominates O:</strong></td>
<td><strong>a inhibits O:</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>defend freedom</strong></td>
<td><strong>the - old man,</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>o-a------A--o</em></td>
<td><em>Ô----a-----A</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td><strong>b has no effect on O:</strong></td>
<td><strong>b has no effect on O:</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>between jobs</strong></td>
<td><strong>in this way</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>o b-----A</em></td>
<td><em>o b----A</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### §7.2.3: Liberation

Accent has the revolutionary property of liberating any syllable on which it falls from domination. Consider the following verse in isolation from its context: it appears to have only four independents (bolded), and thus to be ineligible as a pentameter (though okay as a rough four-beat line): “And **that’s the reason I love him so little**” (o-A o-A-o o-A-o o-A-o). But to scan the verse in this way is to ignore the clear contextual requirement for backgrounding (and thus
Taking it Further: Metrical Analysis

7. de-accenting) “love” as old information, and for establishing through accent a contrast between “him” and “his lady”. The effect of accent on “him” is (1) to allow it to function as a beat, and (2) and to subordinate the neighbouring dominant “love”, thus creating a third-foot swap:

\[ (279) \]

Proteus: O, but I love his lady too-too much,
And that’s the reason [I love] him so little. \( TGV \ 2.4.205 \)

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{o-----A} & \text{o---A--o} & \text{O--a-----O} & \text{o--A--o} \\
&w-----S & w--S & w--W & s-----S & w--S--o
\end{align*} \]

Accent does not itself dominate (a neighbouring independent remains independent), but it subordinates a neighbouring dominant. It is also important to note that while accent may enable a syllable to take a beat, it does not compel it, although it remains, of course, a powerful attractor of the beat. How accent interacts with the metre is decided by a sort of negotiation among three systems: the metrical rules, the obligatory assignment of accent, and the stress-pattern of the lines, and the rule is that metre trumps the other two. In (280) there are three feet affected by accent: 1, 2 and 5. In foot 1 metre and stress are neutral – that is, either a normal or a reversed foot would satisfy their requirements – and so contrastive accent on “thou” determines the issue, making the foot reversed; in the second foot metre dictates (and accent here prefers) a normal foot, despite the stressed syllable in first position; in the fifth foot metre dictates and (and stress prefers) a normal foot, despite the accented syllable in first position and the consequent harsh mapping on “love”, producing a distinctly uneasy rhythm in a line that deals with an uncomfortable situation:

\[ (280) \]

Thou dost love her, because thou know’st I love( her

\( \text{Son. 42.6} \)

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{o-----o} & \text{a---O} & \text{o--B} & \text{o-----A} & \text{O--a-----O} \\
&S---w & w--S & w--S & w----S & w--S--o
\end{align*} \]

§7.3: Scanning Elastic Words

Verses like (277) are, of course, so uncomplicated as to make explicit scansion on two levels redundant. The process is only useful with puzzling or ambiguous verses, and for the most part the puzzle will tend to be about contraction and
expansion. Many of the problems we find in intuitive scansion come from
making too early a decision about dealing with half-syllables, and thus short-
circuiting other possibilities; explicit scansion can make visible the possibilities
our ears have overlooked. Take, for example, the second verse of (281), which
people usually mis-read because they take “our” (which needs to carry a beat)
to be monosyllabic (as it usually is), and thus dominated by “graces” (S indicates
that the position is illegally occupied by a dominated syllable). As scansion
shows, if we expand “our” and contract “towards” (and alter our performance
accordingly) the line scans:

(281) ▶️

Duncan: Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly,
And shall continue our graces towards him. (Mac. 1.6.30)

This example introduces the question of contingent domination: if the half-
vowel in “our” is pronounced it functions like any other syllable in protecting
the preceding syllable from domination; if it is dropped, it is effectively non-
existent and so “our” is dominated by “graces”.

In general it is quicker to try scanning backwards: having anchored the
final independent to the last S-position, we establish foot 5 (F5) and then
successively attempt to find F4, F3, F2 and F1. This may involve back-tracking:
our first run with (281) will make “towards him” F5 and “graces” F4, leaving
us with no independent in F3. In (282), having established F5, we might
consider F4 as reversedvio- but then reject that because F3 would have to be
another reversal, -lights have, and successive reversals are not possible. Instead
we expand the first “violent” and contract the second, and find that the line fits
unproblematically to a primary template:

(282)

These violent delights have violent ends (RJ 2.6.9)

Shakespeare sometimes shifts between contraction and expansion (usually in
that order) of the same proper noun within a line or two:
(283) ►162
\(<\text{Romeo}>! \text{ my cousin Romeo!}\) (\(RJ 2.1.3\))

Then stir\(\text{Demi|trius up| with bitter wrong|};\)
And some|time rail| thou like| \(\text{Demi|trius};\) (\(MND 3.2.361-2\))

If \(\text{Al|cibi|des kill| my coun|trymen|},\)
\(<\text{Let Al|cibi|ades} \text{ know this| of Ty|mon},\) (\(Tt. 5.1.169-70\))

A hateful truth|. / <What, and> from \(\text{Troili|us too}? /\)
From Troy| and \(\text{Tro|ilus}. / \text{Is’t po|ssible}?\) (\(TC 4.4.31-2\))

In the first example the long version represents Benvolio’s final hallooing of the name.

Of course, in reading verse we intuitively scan forward, from left to right, not from right to left. This is not usually a problem: in the case of (282), for example, the first \(\text{violent}\) is followed by a weak (suggesting \(-\text{S wS (w-)}\)) and the second by a strong syllable (suggesting \(-\text{S w (S)}\)). Just occasionally, however, forward scanning on the fly will lead us up the garden path: take, for example, Richard of Gloucester’s description of Lady Anne’s ex-husband: “Young, valiant, wise, and (no doubt) right royal” (\(RJ 1.2.244\)), which on a first reading may strike you as unmetrical. We begin “\(\text{Young, val|iant, wise},\) and …” (because of a sensible heuristic procedure that encourages us to map dominants where possible to S-positions), and then find that we have painted ourselves into a corner:

(284)
\[\text{Young, valiant, wise, and (no doubt) right royal}\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \quad \text{A-öO} \quad \text{A} \quad \text{o---A} \quad \text{a------A-ö} \\
\text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-S} \\
\end{array}\]

One way to recuperate this might be to scan the line with a jolt in the cut after \(\text{wise},\) allowing the actor a deliberate ironic hesitation:

(285) ►163
\[\text{Young, valiant, wise,^ and (no doubt) right royal}\]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \quad \text{A-öO} \quad \text{A} \quad \text{o-----A} \quad \text{a------A-ö} \\
\text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w-S-o} \\
\end{array}\]
Alternatively, we could drag P9, though with no obvious justification:

(286) ►
Young, valiant, wise, and (no doubt) right ~ royal
A A-öO A \ O \ o---A \ a A-ö
w-----S w-----S S-----w w-----S w-S-o

But as a rule, lacunae are rare (and must be, to preserve the integrity of the metre) and should be a last resort in scansion: we shouldn’t invoke them unless there is contextual motivation, a genuine lacuna in the verse (ie too few syllables) and no alternative scansion. The back-to-front method quickly reveals an alternative analysis here with an expanded “valiant”:

(287) ►
Young, valiant, wise, and (no doubt) right royal
A A-öO \ A \ O \ o---A \ a-----A-ö
w-----S wS S-----w w---S w-----S-o

The process of scansion seeks to discover the line – or lines – latent in the verse. In planning a performance one should systematically explore all the possible lines that may be derived from a given verse. Those who do not understand (or fail to keep in mind) the distinction between verse and line (§2.1) are apt to narrow the possibilities of performance, by taking the first line they find in the verse for ‘the’ verse itself; this is what a recent editor of AYL did, for example, when he announced that Celia’s pseudonym “Aliena” (which occurs only once in verse) must be stressed Alíena as in (288a), failing to notice that expanding “Celia” (as in “Ày, Ce|lïă, we stay’d| her fôr| your sake|,” [AYL 1.3.67]) allows the expected Latinate stressing Àliéna:1

(288) ►
No longer Celia, but Aliena. (AYL 1.3.127)

(a) a--A--o A-öO O o-Ao O x
w--S w----S w----S w-Sw-S

(b) a--A--o A-öO o--B-oA-o
w--S w----S wS w--S wS-o

In other words, intuition isn’t always enough: scanning a problematic verse is a way of revealing other possibilities within it. As this example shows, we cannot assume that an editor has done this sort of analysis, even on problematic verse. Take H8 3.2.305, for example, which all modern editions print (following F1) as an unmetrical verse:

(289) ►

Now, if you can blush, and cry ‘guilty’ cardinal,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A} \ 
\text{O} \ 
\text{O} \ 
\text{o-----A} \ 
\text{\text{\text{o}}-----A--o} \ 
\text{| A--\text{\text{o}}} \ 
\text{O}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
[S----w] \ 
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{w----W} \ 
\text{s----S} \ 
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{\text{o}}
\end{align*}
\]

You’ll show a little honesty. (H8 3.2.305)

It is ironic that in the same footnote in which the Arden 2 editor complains that the line is “rhythmically not very satisfactory” (p.116n) he remarks that “Pope’s addition of a comma after ‘can’ is needless, for the sense is good”. Pope’s comma is, of course, a recuperation of the metre: a comma after ‘can’ introduces a cut and gives the (now grammatically isolated) auxiliary the major stress of a main verb. Even if F1 had been carefully printed, introducing a comma (that doesn’t affect the sense) would be a small price to pay for recovering a line: clearly it should be printed (as other eighteenth-century editors agreed) thus:

(290) ►

Now, if you can, blush, and cry ‘guilty’, Cardinal;

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A} \ 
\text{O} \ 
\text{O} \ 
\text{o-----A} \ 
\text{\text{\text{o}}-----A--o} \ 
\text{| A--\text{\text{o}}} \ 
\text{O}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
[S----w] \ 
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{S----w} \ 
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{\text{w----S-----o}}
\end{align*}
\]

There is a similar problem at AYL 2.4.64-5: Celia is given a pair of verses which Arden 2 prints as prose on the grounds that the first of them “scans badly, even with question a trisyllable” (p.40n):

(291) ►

I pray you, one of you question yond man,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{o-----A--o} \ 
\text{\text{o-----A--\text{o}}} \ 
\text{\text{b-----A}}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{w----S} \ 
\text{\text{w----S}} \ 
\text{\text{S----w} \ 
\text{\text{w----S}}}
\end{align*}
\]

If he for gold will give us any food. (AYL 2.4.64)
Scansion shows that the problem is the second “you”, and exposes the possibility that it might be read not as a dominated clitic subject but as part of a (grammatically independent) and somewhat peremptory vocative noun-phrase from the hypoglaecemic princess (ie “one of you [I don’t care who]). The phrase now has its own tone-unit, and the consequent intonational break renders the syllable “you” independent, removing the problem:

(292) ▶ 170
I pray you, one of you, question yond man,
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{o---A---o \ A---o \ O \ A---öö \ b----A} \\
\text{w---b \ w---S \ w---S \ S---w \ w----S}
\end{array}\]

§7.4: Context and Accent
Sometimes accent in Shakespeare’s verse is pointed within the verse itself: “Lóok, here| is writ| ‘kind Ju|lli’a’. Un|kind Ju|(lí’a” (TGV 1.2.106) or “In prai|sing An|túny I| have dis|prais’d Cæ|sar” (AC 2.5.107), or “On thís| side my| hand, and| on that| side yours” (R2 4.1.183). But much of the time it isn’t: if you attempt to scan the verses “For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales” (R3 1.3.199) or “And I lov’d her that she did pity them” (Oth. 1.3.168) in isolation, you will discover them to be unmetrical as pentameters, with an illegal o/S mapping in position 4:

(293)
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,} \\
\text{\quad o--A--o \ o---A \ O \ o----A \ o---A} \\
\text{\quad w--S \ w----S \ [S----w] \ w----S \ w--S} \\
\text{And I lov’d her that she did pity them.} \\
\text{\quad 0 \ o--A-----o \ O \ O \ o---A=ö \ O} \\
\text{\quad S---w \ w----S \ [w----S] \ w--S \ w----S}
\end{array}\]

Indeed, your ear should tell you that neither of them is a pentameter. But (of course) in English a verse should never be scanned apart from its context, because it is context that provides accentuation:

2 The difference can be easily illustrated: subject (“Nobody move! \”), vs vocative (“Nobody! \ Move! \”, a command the Cyclops might have addressed to Odysseus).
Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales,
\[\begin{array}{llll}
& o--A--o & Q---a & o---A \\
& w--S & w----S & w----S & w----S
\end{array}\]

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.
\[\begin{array}{llllll}
& o & o---a & o & o---A-o & o \\
& w----S & w-----S & w---S & w---S
\end{array}\]

As the first example shows, while accent permits a beat to fall on an otherwise dominated syllable, it does not require it: the contextually motivated accent on “was” and the resultant harsh mapping merely provide some interesting rhythmic complication.

Sometimes the process of scansion invites us to consider an accent that might not have occurred to us: nothing much in the context requires an accent on “my” in the following line, for example, but the metre makes it mandatory (since “my” must be mapped to an S-position but is otherwise dominated by “part”), and it puts a particular combative spin on Ursula’s reply:

Viola in the Renaissance Theatre production of TN (DVD FHED 1774) reads (296) with accent on “well”: nothing in the context of meaning makes that a poor choice, but it derails the metre, which requires accent on “that”:

Viola: This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit. 
\[\begin{array}{llllll}
& o & o--a--A---a & o--A & o---A \\
& S----w & w----S & w-----S & w----S & w----S
\end{array}\]
In discursive contexts personal pronouns and possessive adjectives, though inherently unstressed, are a strong attractor for accent, the possibility of which should always be investigated:

(297)

If I lose thee, my loss is my love’s gain,  
\[ \text{(Son. 42.9)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
0 & 0 & a----0 & o--A----0 & 0--a------A \\
S--w & w----S & w--S & w--W & s------S
\end{array} \]

All days are nights to see till I see thee,  
\[ \text{(Son. 43.14)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
a----A & o----A & o--A & B & O & a----0 \\
w----S & w----S & w--S & S--w & w----S
\end{array} \]

And then believe me, my love is as fair  
\[ \text{(Son. 22.10)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
o-----A & o--A----0 & 0--a & O & o----A \\
w----S & w--S & w----S & w----S & w----S
\end{array} \]

§7.5: Scanning Compounds

Compounds are words made by joining two dictionary words to make a new word whose meaning is not just a product of the two, as it is in a phrase: whereas a black bird must be black, for example, a blackbird may be brown (eg a female Turdus merula). Descending trisyllabic compounds like housekeeping and grandfather are inherently problematic for a metre based upon alternation of prominence, and the simplest solution is to map such compounds onto a reversal (S-w w-):

(298) [171]

Henry the Fourth, grandfather to this king,  
\[ \text{(1H6 2.5.63)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
A--o & o--A & A--b & O & O & b---A \\
S--w & w----S & S--w & w--S & w----S
\end{array} \]

Schoolmasters will I keep within my house  
\[ \text{(TS 1.1.94)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
A--b & O & o--A & O & O & o----A \\
S--w & w----S & w--S & w--S & w----S
\end{array} \]

Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.  
\[ \text{(TGV 1.1.2)} \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
A----b & O & A & A \ A-o \ A-o & A \\
S----w & w----S & [w----S]w----S & w--S
\end{array} \]
More commonly, however, we find ‘grandfather’ compounds beginning in the strong position of a normal foot. The rationale for this is that the second syllable of such compounds, as a dominated b-syllable, does not dominate the third:

(299)  
Thy deeds, thy plainness, and thy housekeeping  
\(\text{o---A} \quad \text{o---A---o} \quad \text{o---A---b} \quad \text{O}\)  
\(\text{w--S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w--S}\)  

My father and my grandfather were kings;  
\(\text{o--A--o} \quad \text{o---A---b} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{o-----A}\)  
\(\text{w--S} \quad \text{w---S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w--S} \quad \text{w----S}\)  

We sent our schoolmaster; is he come back?  
\(\text{o--A} \quad \text{o------A---b} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{\backslash} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{\ö--a-----A}\)  
\(\text{w--S} \quad \text{w------S} \quad \text{w--S} \quad \text{S--w} \quad \text{w----S}\)  

A knot you are of damnëd blood-suckers.  
\(\text{o---A--ö} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{o---A--ö} \quad \text{A----b} \quad \text{O}\)  
\(\text{w----S} \quad \text{w---S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w--S}\)  

And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer;  
\(\text{o----A-----öO} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{o--A} \quad \text{o---A--b} \quad \text{O}\)  
\(\text{w----S} \quad \text{w---S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w--S}\)  

Provided that you do no outrages  
\(\text{o--A--o} \quad \text{O} \quad \text{o---A} \quad \text{o--A--b} \quad \text{O}\)  
\(\text{w--S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w--S} \quad \text{w--S}\)  

The pattern, odd as it seems, is normal for such compounds in Shakespeare (nine out of the twelve occurrences of the word grandfather pattern this way) and standard throughout the tradition of iambic pentameter, even in the work of that doyen of metrical ‘correctness’, Alexander Pope:

(300)  
In Summer-Days like Grasshoppers rejoice  
\(\text{o---A--o} \quad \text{A} \quad \text{o------A---b--o} \quad \text{o--A}\)  
\(\text{w----S} \quad \text{w----S} \quad \text{w-----S} \quad \text{w--S} \quad \text{w--S}\)
And Beau’s in **Snuff-boxes** and Tweezer-Cases.  (Pope, *Rape* 5.116)

```
  o-----A    o-----A----b O    o-----A--o    A-o
  w-----S    w-----S     w-S    w-----S    w--S-o
```

Each **Word-catcher** that lives on syllables  (Pope, *Ep. Arb.* 166)

```
  a-----A----b    O    o-----A    o-----A--o    O
  w-----S    w-----S     w-S    w-----S    w--S
```

The **grandfather** pattern **A-b O** occurs in reverse (as **O b-A**) when a two-
syllabled endstressed function word like *among* is followed immediately by a
dominant, and it is found in the same counter-intuitive (and – to our ears –
somewhat awkward) mapping (**S w-S**):

```
(301) ►173

Henceforth be never number’d among men!  (MND 3.2.67)

  b----A    O--A-ö    A--o ö    O b----A
  w-----S    w--S    w----S    w-----S    w--S

That it is proof and bulwark against sense.  (Ham. 3.4.38)

  o  o    o-----A    o-----A--o    O b-------A
  [w--S]    w-----S    w----S    w--S    w-------S

And therein wretched, although free. But if  (TNK 3.1.27)

```
  o-----A--b    A----o    O    b-------A    O  O
  w-----S    w----S    w---A    o-----A    w--S
```

cp And solid pudding against empty praise.  (Pope, *Dunc.* 1.51f.)

```
  o-----A--o    A----o    O    b----A----o    A
  w-----S    w----S    w---S    w----S    w--S
```

Príde, Malice, Folly against Dryden rose  (Pope, *EC* 458)

```
  o  A-o    A--o    O--b    A-o    A
  w----S    w-----S    w-S    w-------S    w--S
```

But there is a third way of accommodating such compounds to the metre, as we
shall see in the next section.
§7.6: Scanning and Stress Exchange

As we have seen, in normal speech the Alternating Stress Rule (§1.2.3) serves to exchange the positions of the two stresses in a double-stressed word like *unknówn* to avoid consecutive major stresses, and it naturally works the same way in verse:

(302)

<Nor is| your firm| resolve| ūnknown| to mē|,  
To make| it wan|der in| an un|known field|?

(TS 2.1.92)  
(CE 3.2.38)

In verse the rule is generalised to accommodate just about any sequence of three stresses to an alternating $S w-S$ pattern (but see §2.3.4); in such cases it is always worth investigating the possibility that contextually motivated accent should fall on the first syllable (it would make sense in the first line of (303), for example) but there is no need for it to do so (stress-exchanges are surrounded by brackets):

(303)

And so he plays his part. The *sixth age shifts*  

\[
\begin{array}{llllllll}
w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S\\
\end{array}
\]

Tòngues spit their duties out, and *cold hearts freeze*

(H8 1.2.61)

\[
\begin{array}{llllllll}
a&---A& o&---A& o&A & (A&---a) & A \\
w&---S&w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S\\
\end{array}
\]

Seem to besiege, and make his *bold waves tremble,*  

\[
\begin{array}{llllllll}
A&---ō& o&A& o&A& o&(A&---a) & A&ō \\
S&---w&w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S\\
\end{array}
\]

That I have ta’en away this *old man’s daughter,*  

\[
\begin{array}{llllllll}
O&ō& o&Aō& o&A& b&(A&---a) & A&ō \\
[w&S]& w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S&w&S\\
\end{array}
\]

In pentameter the Alternating Stress Rule is also extended (optionally) to compounds, even disyllable ones. In general you would expect a compound like
midnight to scan Sw, in the same way as a word like middle, and in general that is what you find:

(304)

Thou call’dst me up at midnight to fetch dew

\( o-----A--------\)A  \( o-----A--b \)  \( \ddot{o}--a-----A \)

\( w----S \)  \( w-S \)  \( w----S \)  \( w-------W \)  \( s------S \)

We’ll over-reach the greybeard, Gremio,

\( o\ddot{o}-----A-o \)  \( B \)  \( o-----A---b \)  \( A-\ddot{o}O \)

\( w----S \)  \( w----S \)  \( w------S \)  \( wS \)

And laid the love-juice on some true-love’s sight. (MND 3.2.89)

\( o----A \)  \( o--A------b \)  \( O \)  \( o-----A----b \)  \( A \)

\( w----S \)  \( w--S \)  \( w----S \)  \( w------S \)  \( w----S \)

But thanks to the extended Alternating Stress Rule we also find such words scanning wS:

(305)

\( \text{Keep word, Lysander; we must starve our sight} \) (MND 1.1.223)

From lovers’ food till morrow deep midnight.

\( o----A-o \)  \( A \)  \( o-----A--o \)  \( A \)  \( (b--A) \)

\( w----S \)  \( w-------S \)  \( w----S \)  \( w----S \)  \( w--S \)

Have I in conquest stretch’d mine arm so far

To be afeard to tell greybeards the truth? (JC 2.2.67)

\( O \)  \( O \)  \( o--Aö \)  \( o--A \)  \( (b--A) \)  \( o--A \)

\( [w--S] \)  \( w--S \)  \( w--S \)  \( w--S \)  \( w--S \)

But hast thou yet latch’d the Athenian’s eyes

With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do? (MND 3.2.37)

\( O \)  \( O \)  \( (b----A) \)  \( \&O \)  \( o----A----o \)  \( O \)

\( [S------w] \)  \( w----S \)  \( [S--w] \)  \( w----S \)  \( w----S \)

Effectively, under the extended ASR a grändfàther compound can behave metrically as though it were a phrase like òld fäther. This is the usual way of
scanning novel or nonce-compounds like sea-sorrow, but it is also occasionally used for established compounds:

(306)
\[
\text{Defile the locks of your} \quad \text{shriiil-shrieking} \quad \text{daughters;} \quad (H5 \ 3.3.35)
\]
\[
o-A \quad o--A--\bar{O} \quad o \quad (b----A)--o \quad A--o
\]
\[
w-S \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w----S \quad w----S--o
\]

Sit still, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow: \((Tp. \ 1.2.170)\)
\[
a----A \quad o----A \quad o--A--\bar{O} \quad o \quad (b--A)--o
\]
\[
w----S \quad w----S \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w--S--o
\]

Ay, some mad message from his mad grandfather. \((Tit. \ 4.2.3)\)
\[
A \quad A \quad a--A--o \quad o \quad o--A \quad (b--A)--o
\]
\[
w----S \quad w----S \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w--S--o
\]

Turning his side to the dew-dropping south. \((RJ \ 1.4.103)\)
\[
A--o \quad o--A--\bar{O} \quad o \quad (b--A)--o \quad A
\]
\[
S--w \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w----S \quad w----S
\]

Doth with his lofty and shriiil-sounding throat \((Ham. \ 1.1.151)\)
\[
O \quad O \quad o--A--o \quad o \quad (b----A)--o \quad A
\]
\[
[S----w] \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w----S \quad w----S
\]

It will be noticed that when extended ASR in feet 3 and 4 combines with initial reversal the temptation to read the verse as four-beat dactylic is very strong: “Turning his \(^2\) face to the \(^3\) dew-dropping \(^4\) South”.

\section*{§7.7: Scanning Short Pentameters}

Where a verse has fewer than ten available syllables (ie including all half-syllables but discounting any syllable after the last independent) we investigate the possibility of a lacuna, if the context of meaning and the structure of the verse will allow it. If, for example, after successfully working backwards we find just one independent in the first foot, we may assume the most common kind of lacuna, the initial jolt (producing headlessness):
Go, take hence that traitor from our sight.  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{\(A\)} & \text{a----A} & \text{b----A\--\(o\)} & \text{o----A} \\
\text{w--S} & \text{w-----S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S}
\end{array}
\]

Set it down. Is ink and paper ready?  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{\(A\)--\(o\)} & \text{A} & \text{o--A} & \text{o----A\--\(o\)} & \text{A\--\(o\)} \\
\text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S\--\(o\)}
\end{array}
\]

And he bid us follow to the temple.  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{\(O\)} & \text{o--A\--\(o\)} & \text{A\--\(o\)} & \text{O} & \text{o--A\--\(o\)} \\
\text{w--S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w--S\--\(o\)}
\end{array}
\]

We may find that a jolt will scan to a cut within the verse:

You and your crafts! You have crafted fair!  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{\(O\)} & \text{O} & \text{o-----A} & \text{\(\backslash\)O} & \text{o-----A\--\(o\)} & \text{A} \\
\text{S--\(w\)} & \text{w-----S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S}
\end{array}
\]

In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{o--A} & \text{o--A\--\(o\)} & \text{\(\backslash\)A} & \text{\(\backslash\)A\--\(o\)} & \text{\(\backslash\)A} \\
\text{w--S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S}
\end{array}
\]

Why, so did’st thou. Seem they grave and learned?  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{A} & \text{A--\(\(\backslash\)o\)} & \text{\(\backslash\)O} & \text{\(\backslash\)A-----\(\backslash\)o\)} & \text{A} & \text{o----A\--\(\backslash\)o} \\
\text{[w--S]} & \text{w--------S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S\--\(\backslash\)o}
\end{array}
\]

Sometimes we may find the context suggesting contrastive accent on a stress that would otherwise be subordinated, providing the conditions for a drag (note that the artificial prolongation of the dragged syllable, indicated here by a colon (see §4.2), prevents the following major from being subordinated):

Macbeth: Now, if you have a station in the file,  
Not i’ the worst rank of manhood, say it,  
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{O} & \text{O} & \text{o--A} & \text{\(\backslash\)A} & \text{o--A\--\(b\)} & \text{A--\(\backslash\)o} \\
\text{[S--\(w\)]} & \text{w--S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w------S\--\(\backslash\)o}
\end{array}
\]
**Aegeon:** That very hour, and in the self-same inn,
A mean woman was delivered

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{o--} & : \text{A-o} & \text{o} & \text{o-A-ö Ö} \\
\text{w--} & : \text{w-S w---S w-S w-S}
\end{align*}
\]

(CE 1.1.54)

If there are only four usable independents in the verse (successive weak independents need to be separated by a cut) and there is a cut, or the verse ends with a dependent, we may suspect a silent beat:

(310)

You have not sought it! How comes it then?

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O} & \quad \text{O} & \text{o---A----o} & \text{\backslash} & \text{a---A----o} & \text{A} \\
\text{S---w} & \quad \text{w----S} & \text{w--S w----S} & \text{w----S}
\end{align*}
\]

(1H4 5.1.27)

Is he not honest? / Honest, my lord?

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O} & \quad \text{O} & \text{o---A-o} & \quad \text{\backslash} & \text{A-o} & \quad \text{\backslash} & \text{o---A} \\
\text{[S---w]} & \quad \text{w----S} & \text{w----S} & \text{S-w} & \text{w--S}
\end{align*}
\]

(Oth. 3.3.103)

Would he deny his letter, said he?

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O} & \quad \text{O} & \text{o-A} & \quad \text{o---A--o} & \quad \text{A----Ö} & \quad \text{\backslash} \\
\text{[S----w]} & \quad \text{w-S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w--S}
\end{align*}
\]

(KL 2.1.78)

Sometimes there may be a choice of lacunae; in (190) in §4.2, for example, an alternative to drags enabled by the contrastive accenting of the pronouns you and he would be in either case a silent beat at the caesura. It is a possible reading (the first could be marked by a gesture of bafflement, and the second could be a question-final rest), though it seems less motivated to me than the version with accent and drag. As with all performative choices, it is a matter of interpretation; a good case could be made for reading the following not with a third-foot rest (as in (215) in §5.2) but a fifth-foot drag, with contextually motivated accent on so:

(311)

**Lady Macbeth:** I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums

And dash’d the brains out, had I so \(\approx\) sworn

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{o----A} & \quad \text{o--(A----a)} & \quad \text{\backslash} & \text{O} & \quad \text{O} & \quad \text{A-----a} \\
\text{w----S} & \quad \text{w----S} & \text{w----S} & \text{w--S} & \text{w----S} & \text{(with drag)} \\
\text{o----A} & \quad \text{o--(A----a)} & \quad \text{\backslash} & \text{O} & \quad \text{O} & \quad \text{a----A}
\end{align*}
\]

(Mac. F1 1.7.58)
And dash’d the brains out, <!> had I so sworn
\[ w----S \quad w----S \quad w----S \quad w--S \quad w----S \] (with rest)

It is crucial to remember, however, that lacunae are not just a formal device: they point to a world of meaning outside the phonological structures of the metre. They need, therefore, not just to be structurally possible, but plausibly motivated in some way: they are not simply a device for recuperating unmetrical verses. The following unmetrical verses all occur in F1 Macbeth (the only textual source for the play that we have):

(312)

(a) Norway himselfe, with terrible numbers (TLN 76)³
\[ A--o \quad o--A \quad o----A--o \quad o---A--o \]
\[ S--w \quad w--S \quad w----S \quad w--S \]

(b) He hath beene in vnusuall Pleasure (TLN 587)
\[ O \quad O \quad O \quad o-A-o \quad o-A-o \quad o-A-o \]
\[ w----S \quad w--S \quad w--S \quad w--S \]

(c) He is about it, the Doores are open (TLN 652)
\[ O \quad O \quad o--B--o \quad o--A \quad o---A--o \]
\[ w--S \quad w----S \quad S----w \quad w--S \]

(d) Or did lyne the Rebell with hidden helpe, (TLN 220)
\[ O \quad o----A \quad o--A--o \quad o----A--o \quad A \]
\[ w----S \quad w----S \quad S--w \quad w----S \quad w----S \]

(e) Which you thought had been our innocent selfe. (TLN 1073)
\[ O \quad o----A----o \quad O \quad o--A--o \quad o----A \]
\[ w----w \quad w----S \quad S----w \quad w--S \quad w----S \]

Each of these, as a little experiment will show, can be ‘rescued’ with either a final rest or an initial jolt (I will leave this as an exercise for the reader), but in

³ The passage this line is taken from remains unsatisfactory even after relineation, with a stranded fragment “With terrible numbers”. Pope suggested that Shakespeare might have written “<Norway> himself|, with num|bers te|rrible|” (cp “And prophesying, with accents terrible”, Mac. 2.3.57), a richer line in that “terrible” now qualifies both “numbers” and “Norway”.
no case would such a measure be justified in terms of meaning and context. It is pleasing to report, therefore, that in none of these cases is it necessary, since each verse occurs in an unmetrical passage that can be restored to metricality simply by relineation, and which presumably therefore represents a compositorial mislineation (common in F1). Modern editors vary, however, in the extent to which they are willing to acknowledge and repair such mislineations (see Groves, 2007, for a fuller discussion).
Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare
Appendix A: Differently Stressed Words

The following is an attempt to list those Shakespearean word-stress and syllabification patterns that might surprise a British or an American reader, or both. Some interesting experiments have been made at the New Globe Theatre in London in performing Shakespeare’s plays in some approximation to ‘original’ accents, but the purpose of reproducing the stress-patterns of Shakespeare’s English (where they differ from ours) is not to make some purist attempt at ‘authenticity’ but rather to preserve where possible the rhythmic structure of his verse. Of course, saying things like *acceptable* and *precinct* can make one’s speech sound odd and alienating, and it may at times threaten ready intelligibility. For these reasons such pronunciations should only be used in verse, and only when necessary to rescue the metre. For example, the Elizabethan stressing *authórise* is necessary to the metre in a verse like “His rude|ness so| with his| *autho|riz’d youth*|” (*ALC* 104), but in “*Authoriz’d* by her grandam. Shame itself,” (*Mac.* 3.4.65) we can get away with the inauthentic but familiar modern pronunciation by introducing a reversal (“<Autho>riz’d b y| … ”). This explains why I have not exhaustively listed every possible variant stressing: I have only supplied an Elizabethan stress-pattern where it is required at least once to rescue the metre. Take, for example, the word *retinue*: Fausto Cercignani argues on philological grounds that Shakespeare uses *retínue*, but the evidence from contemporary scansion is mixed, and since its only verse occurrence in Shakespeare (“But other of your insolent retinue” [*KL* 1.4.202]) will allow both possibilities (depending on whether *insolent* is contracted to *inslent*), the least disruptive choice is to

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1 See Crystal (2005) for more information.

2 (Cercignani 1981, 42); Richard Brathwait (1588–1673) scans the word both ways (*Againe*, *mongst all*| my ré*tinüe*, no knave| (“The Ape of Vaine-glory”); *With such*| a Pen|sion òur| Retí|nue pay| (“The Judiciall Ape”).
pronounce it as in modern English (which is why it does not appear in the following list).

There are three kinds of stress-pattern in Shakespeare’s words: **fixed**, predictably variable, and randomly variable. Words in **bold** are always so stressed in Shakespeare; words in *italics* are so stressed only where indicated, and elsewhere stressed as in modern English (sometimes differently stressed forms are in free variation, as with *gárage* and *garáge* in current English; we find, for example, both *récord* and *recórd* for the noun, used as the metre requires). Words *underlined* are double-stressed in Shakespeare’s English, and follow the Alternating Stress Rule (§1.2.3), which means that they are endstressed (distinct, éxtrème, fôrlón, òbscûre, sùpréme) except where they are directly followed by a dominant in the same phrase: distinct bréath, ýxtrème râge, fôrlón children, òbscûre bûrd, sùpréme fûve. Some of these words, like côndémn, dêsèrve and sècûre, are no longer double-stressed, which makes them awkward to pronounce when fore-stressed (“Upon| my sé|cûre hóur| thy un|cle stole|” [Ham. 1.5.61]); the less disruptive choice may be to pronounce them as in modern English. I have added suggested pronunciations, both in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and in a more *ad hoc* form for those who don’t read it, where they seem to be necessary (I have put post-vocalic /r/ in brackets because only some dialects of English pronounce it).

I have included below one or two words that are not – or not necessarily – differently stressed in Shakespeare, but about which doubts might reasonably arise, like triumph. I have also included the few words which have consistently a different number of syllables in his English, such as ñ-chës, and one or two that can be expanded in his English but not in ours, such as bû-si-ness. This is also the place to note a systematic difference in syllabic length between Shakespeare’s English and ours: the possessive of nouns ending in /s/. For Shakespeare, while plural mistresses has three syllables (“When mis|tressês| from co|mmon sense| are hid|” [LLL 1.1.64]), possessive mistress’ has only two, and sounds just like the non-possessive form. All the bolded words in the following lines have just two syllables:

(313)

My mis|tress’ eyes| are no|thing lîke| the sun|; (Son. 130.1)
I crave| your High|ness’ par|don. / Hê is ma|(rried? (AC 2.5.98)
Upon| old Brútus’ sta|tue. All| this done|, (JC 1.3.146)
Fûll thir|ty times| hath Phoc|bus’ cart| gôn e round| <Neptune’s> sàlt wash| and Te|llus’ or|bêd ground| (Ham. 3.2.154-5)
The exception is when the noun is a monosyllable: then the possessive has two syllables, as shown by the way in which Mars’ is spelt in the original texts as Marses or (by a misunderstanding of the possessive suffix) Mars his:

(314)

\(<\text{Marses}\) hot Min’on is| return| againe| \(\text{Tp. 4.1.98, F1}\)

On Mar|ses Ar|mor forg’d| for proofe| eterne|, \(\text{Ham. 2.2.490, Q2}\)

On Mars| his Ar|mours, forg’d| for proofe| Eterne|, \(\text{ibid.}, \text{F1}\)

Where the part of speech is not specified in the list, it is irrelevant. The abbreviation PNS denotes that a variant pronunciation, though found in the canonical plays, is ‘probably not Shakespearean’: for example, we find confessor (still the stressing for many English Catholics) throughout the canon, except in those parts of Henry VIII now believed to be by Fletcher, where we find modern PNS confessor. This is, of course, of no particular relevance to the question of how the verse is to be read, but may help to explain some anomalies to the curious.

**Stress-patterns:** **Fixed, Predictably Variable, and Randomly Variable**

| ãbsûrd | canônise |
| áchéês (noun) /ˈeɪtʃəz/ aitches | cément (/ˈsɪmmt/ sɪmmt-ant/) |
| (sg. aitch); aches (verb) /ˈeɪks/ akes | céremóny |
| acceptable | charácter (Luc., TGV, 2H6 3.1, Ham. 1.3, Per.; otherwise charácter) |
| accés (once access, Ham. 2.1.111) | charáctry |
| àsçessary | chástise /ˈtʃæstɪs/ (cháss-tiss); chastise, Tp. |
| àdvérse | chástisement /ˈtʃæstɪsmnt/ (cháss-tiss-ment) |
| advértise | chevalíer (three syllables, like cavalier) |
| advértisement | cómbat |
| allý, allíes | commandément (four syllables in 1H6, PNS; elsewhere three)³ |
| árchbishop | cómmendable (comméndable only at MV 1.1.111) |
| aspécct | commérce |
| authórise | |

---

³ Three syllables, not four, at MV 4.1.151 (‘Be va|lud| against| your wiues| commande|ment’).
còmmít
còmpél
còmpélète

cómplot (at R3 3.1.192 read yi-ëld)
comráde (also cómrade, KL 2.4.210)
còncéal
concúpiscible
conféssor (conféssor in H8 PNS)
cònfíne
cônfírm
confiscate (confiscate in CE 1.2.2 and MV)
conflúx
congéal
conjur’d (Oth.)
conquést (Tim.)
consign
conspíracy
consort
construe
conténts
contráct (as noun; usually cóntract)
contráry (cóntrary in Son. 62.11, 2H6 3.1.58)
cóntrovèrsy
cónter
corollary
corrosive
còrrúpt
cúrtail
deféct
deféctable
démonstrable
démonstrate (Oth., Tim.)
déscant
désérve
dèspise
détestable
diékct
discóurse
dispérsed
distinct
distréss
dívers (adj.)
dividable (but undividable)
ducdámë
edict (also édict in R3, AC.)
effigès /e'fɪʤɪz/ eff-idg-i-eez
empirèc
ènjoín
ent’rance
èntire
envy verb (Son. 128, TS)
éxact (adj.)
éxéct (meaning executioner; otherwise exécutor)
exile (/ɪg'zail/ ig-zîle), noun: TGV, AYL, R2
èxpèl
èxpíre
explóit
éxquisite
éxtréórdinàry (six syllables)
éxtréme
fértile /'fɜːrl/ (fê[r]-tîl)
fòrlór
fòrnícâtress
frústrate
handling
hóspitable
hóstess
illústrate
imp'ous
impórt
impórtune
impréss
incárdnade
insáne
instínc
intr'rogat'ry
jugg'ler
Júly
láméntable

mankind (Mac. 2.4.18; AC 4.8.25; Cor. 4.2.16; Tim. 3.4.83, 4.3 passim)
méd'cinable
méd'cine
méd'cinal /'med,sainəl/ (média-sinə-l)
merváíous
miscónstrue
multípotent
mútine

needle rhymes with feel

obdúrate
óbscůre
óbservant (noun)
oppórtune
ór'dain (Tit.)
ór'gulous
órison
outrége (1H6 4.1.126 PNS)

pérdurable
pérdurably

pérempt'ry (PNS pr'émp'tr, 2H6, Per.)
pérfect (verb and adj.; properly, /'p3[r]f3t/ pé[r]f3t)
perfúme (verb)
pérfume (noun; perfúme TS; possibly Tim., Cym.)
persév'rance
perséver[e]
pér'spective
píoner
plób'an (plebían, Tit., H5)
portént
precinct
prespíence (TC)
preténcé
príncess
prófound
promúlgate
préstrate
protést
púi'ssance (/'pjusns/ pylóo-i-sanss)
purpórt
púrsúe
púrsuit (Son. 143.4)
púrveyor
pyránidés (AC 5.2.61)

quíntessence

réceptacle
recórd (noun; also récord)
rélapse (H5)
réspite
revénue (also révenue)
rhématic

sécůre
sepúlchre (verb)
séquester (but sequester’d, AYL 2.1.43)

serpígo (/səˈpaigə/ sa(r)-pí-go)

siníster

sojóurn’d (MND)

sóld’er

solémnizëd (LLL, Tp.)

spír’t

státuë (sometimes spelt statua in C16 texts) 2H6 3.2.80, R3 3.7.25; JC 2.2.76 and 3.2.192)

súbdúe

súcessive (MM)

súccessor

suppliance (= ‘supply’; nb Shakespeare does not use suppliance [= ‘supplication’].)

súpportable (but insuppórtable)

súpréme

súrty (/ʃu(r)ti/) shú(r)e [rhymes with pure] -ti

transláte

triúmpher

turmóil

úknówn (as other disyllables beginning with predix un-, such as úntrúth)

útensil

wárr’nt (nb only fully contractable in rhotic dialects like Shakespeare’s or General American)

wássail (/ˈwɔsəl/ wossle)

Wéndnesday (/ˈwɛnzd,deɪ/, wénz-day, as in Pres. E.)

wrést’ler (/ˈresələ(r)/ réssələ(r)
Appendix B: 
Pronouncing Shakespeare’s Names

The following list of names in Shakespeare is not exhaustive (no likely reader of this book needs, for example, to be told how to pronounce *Julia* or *Venice*), but I have included names that may not be transparent in their pronunciation to non-British readers, such as *Gloucester* and *Abergavenny*, and others that will cause difficulty only to British readers, such as *Glamis* (two syllables in Shakespeare). I have omitted names that do not occur in verse, such as *Conrade*. Most names in *-ia, -io, -eo, -eus* and *-ius* will be contracted or not, according to the metre (compare *Ill met| by moon|light, proud* | *Tita|niå* | with *There sleeps* | *Tita|n’a some|time åf| the night*). To illustrate the marking conventions: in *Àlcibiades*, the first syllable âl carries minor stress, the second ci is unstressed, the third bí carries major stress, the fourth å is half-vowel (that is, it may or may not be fully sounded, depending on the metre) and the fifth dës is sounded (syllables are only so indicated where there might be doubt – *Alcibiades* might, after all, rhyme with *glades*). Syllables in the last two categories are always unstressed. Parts of words given in square brackets are not pronounced: *Wo(r)cester*.

Pronunciation, where necessary, is indicated as in Appendix A. For the most part I have not indicated how vowels and doubtful consonants (like <ch>) should be pronounced, because it is not metrically relevant: the choice between *Maria* rhyming (in non-rhotic dialects) with *fire* (the traditional pronunciation) or with *fear* (the modern version) will not affect the rhythm of the line but may well signify other matters (a *Twelfth Night* set in Edwardian England might well prefer the first version, whereas a modern-dress production might find it alienating).
List of Names

Áberg[av]enný (/ˈæbə(r)gənɪ/ á-bə[r]-gən-ɪ, g as in gun)

Abhórson

Aenéas

Ájax (/ˈeɪdʒəks/, ey-jacks)

Álbany (/ˈɔlbəni/ áwl-bə-ni)

Álençon

Ángiers (Angíers, KJ 1.1.1)

Agénor

Águecheek (/ˈeɪɡjuʧik/ áy-gyoo-cheek)

Àlcibíadës (/ˌælsɪˈbaiədɪz/ ál-si-bye-ə-deez)

Àliéna

Ám'iens

Amphímacus

Andrómachë

Andrónicus

Ángelo

Anténor

Antígonus

Antiochus

Antípolus

Apemántus

Árcite (/ˈɔ(r)sait/ åh(r)-site)

Ár'el (/eərɪəl/, like ariel)

Árragon

Àrvirágus

Ásïa (always three syllables)

Aúsidius

Aumérle

Autólycus

Bácchus (/ˈbækəs/, back-əs)

Bálthasar

Baptísta Mínola


Bárnadîne

Béaufort (/ˈbɔufɔt/ bó-fɔt)

Bénedick

Benvól'o

Bérk[e]ley (/ˈbɛrk(ə)li/ bərk[ə]-li)

Berówne (/ˈbɛrəʊn/ bə-róʊn)

Bígot

B’ondélo

Bólingbroke (/ˈbʊlinbɾuːk/ bull-ing-brook; rhymes with cook)

Borách’o

Bórdeaux

Boyét (/bɔiˈɛt/ boy-ɛtt)

Brákenbury (/ˈbreknbri/ brákk-ən-bri)

Búckingham (/ˈbʌkŋəm/ bük-king-əm; first syllable rhymes with duck)

Búrgundy

Cáius (/ˈkɔjəs/ kie-əs)

Cálais (/ˈkæls/ cálliss; rhymes with Alice)

Cáliban

Calpúrnia

Campéius

Càrlísle (/ˌkɑrˈlɪsli/ càr-liisle)

Céfia (always three syllables)

Cérimon

Cesáro

Chárlêmàin (ie Charlemagne)

Chárman (/tʃa(r)mən/ chár-mee-ən)

Chatilléon (not Chatillon)

Chíron (/ˈkærən/ kie-rən)

Cláud’o (clore, not clow)

Cláudus (clore, not clow)

Cleómenës
Appendix B: Pronouncing Shakespeare’s Names

Clóten
Coléville (/ˈkɔʊləvɪl/ kɔe-la-vill)
Cólëvéille
Cólmé
Corëli(a)
C’riolánus (/ˈkəˌrɛiəˌlɛɪnəs/ kə-rē-ə-láy-ənəs)
C’rioli (/ˈkəˈrɛiəˌlai/ kə-rē-ə-laye)
Crëssid(a)
Cýmbeline

Dáuphin (/ˈdɔ̃fɛn/ daw-fin)
Dé’c’us
Dëiphobus
Dësdémona
Dì’mèdes (but Dì’med)
Dionýza
Dòlabèlla
Dónalbàin
Dóriclës
Dúnsinàne

Égëus
Églamour
Elýsium
Énòbàrbus
Éphësus
Éscalus
Éuphratës

Fàulconbridge (/ˈfɔknbrɪdʒ/ fɔw-kən-brɪdʒ)
Féstë (rhymes with chesty)
Fidélë
Flamín’us
Flá’vs
Fléànce
Flórizel
Flüélënn
Fòrtinbràs (rhymes with lass)

Gállathë
Gánymède
Glámis (/ˈɡlæms/ glám-iss [not Pres. E. /ˈɡlæms/ glahmz])
Glëndóv’r
Gló[uce]ster (/ˈɡlɔsə/ glóss-tə, except in 1H6, where it is PNS Glóúcester, [/”ɡlɔsət/ glóss-ass-tə])
Gló[uce]stërsheir (/ˈɡlɔstə/ glóss-tə-shə)

Gón’ril
Gonzálo
Grat’áno
Grënnwich (/ˈɡrɛntʃ/ grinn-itch)
Grém’o
Guidér’us

Hécate (/ˈhekət/ hék-ət)
Hécuba
Hélëna
Hélenus
Hèlicánus
Hén’ry
Hérefo[r]dshire (/ˈhæ(r)fəd[ʃə]/ hā(r)-fəd-[ʃə])
Hér’m’a
Herm’ënë
Héro (here-ob, as in superhero, not herro)

Hippólïyta
Hô[l]m[e]don (/ˈhɔumdən/ hómo-dən)
Hòloférnës
Horât’o (/ˈhɔrətʃɔ/ hə-rät-shə-ob)
Hortëns’o
Húmph’rey

Iáchimo (/ˈjækimɔ/ yá-kee-moh)
1’ágø (/ˈiɡəʊ/ ee-yåh-go)
Illyria
Ímogen (or Ínnogen)

Jacquenetta
 Jáquès (/ˈʤeikwiz/ jay-kweez; always two syllables)
 Jóurdain (like Jordan)
 Júliet

Lában (/leibən/, lay-bən)
 Láértês (/ləiˈʃiːz/ ləy-ér-teez)
 Lafeú (/ləˈfju/ la-fyoo)
 Lándes
 Laváche (rhymes with cash)
 Lé[ice]ster[shire] (/ˈlestəʃə/ léss-tə-[shə])
 Lènâto, -us
 Léontes
 Lépidus
 Línco[l]n[shire] (/ˈlɪŋkɔnʃə/) / ˈlɪŋkɔn[ʃə])
 Lódovíco
 Lóvell (/ˈlɔvl/ luvv-əl; first syllable same as love)
 Lúcâna
 Lúcrece
 Lucíus
 Lucíllus
 Lychorida
 Lysânder
 Lysímachus

Marcadé (/ˈmɑ(r)kəˈdɛi/ ma(r)-kə-day)
 Marcélus
 Margarálon
 María
 Marâna
 Marina

Marséillës (/ˈmɑ(r)ˈseliz/ mar-sell-eez)
 Melún
 Menécratës
 Menén’us
 Mentéith
 Messála
 Mílan
 Montáno
 Montgóm’ry
 Montjoy (to the French; Móntjoy to the English)
 Mówbray (/ˈmɔubri/ mở-bri)
 Mýtilène (/ˈmɪtliːn/ mi-ti-lee-n; but /ˌmɪtliˈni/ mi-ti-lée-ni to Marina)
 Níobe (/ˈnaiəbi/ nye-a-bee)
 Nórfölk (/ˈnɔrfʊk/ nó(r)-fuk)
 Northúmb’land (/ˈnɔ(r)θʌmbɔ(r)land/ no(r)-thúm-bə(r)-lænd)

Oberôn (rhymes with sober on)
 Orléans
 Orsíno
 Othélló

Paróllës (/ˈpærəliz/ pa-róll-eez)
 Pàlamèdes
 Pálamon
 Pèmbrówk (/ˈpɛmbrəʊk/ pém-brəʊk)
 Pérdita
 Pérclíès
 Petrúch’o
 Philippí
 Philomèl
 Philoméla
 Philostrâte (/ˈfɪləstroʊt/ fil-a-strayt)
 Píndaros
 Pírothous (three syllables, TNK)
Appendix B: Pronouncing Shakespeare’s Names

1.3.55 and elsewhere in Shakespeare’s part; *Piróthous* (PNS: four syllables, TNK 4.1.12 and elsewhere in Fletcher’s part)

**Plantágenet**

**Poitiers** (/ˈpoʊtɪə(r)z/ /poy-ţiərs)

**Políxenës**

**Polón'us**

**Polýdamus**

**Pórt’a** (/ˈpɔ(r)ʃəl prɔtʃɔ/ pɔ[r]-sha)

**Posthúmus** (Posthumus at Cym. 4.2.321)

**Pròculéius**

**Próspero**

**Pucélle**

**Pýramus**

**Rágozine**

**Rambúrës**

**Régan** (/ˈrɪɡən/ Rée-gən)

**Ródfrígo**

**Rome** (/rum/; rhymes with boom)

**Rósalind**

**Rousíllon**

**Róuen** (/ˈrɔʊn/ Rone; PNS /ˈrɔʊən/ Ro-ən at 1H6 1.1.65)

**Rágozine**

**Rambúrës**

**Régan** (/ˈrɪɡən/ Rée-gən)

**Ródfrígo**

**Rome** (/rum/; rhymes with boom)

**Rósalind**

**Rousíllon**

**Róuen** (/ˈrɔʊn/ Rone; PNS /ˈrɔʊən/ Ro-ən at 1H6 1.1.65)

**Saint Álbans** (/sntˈælbənz/ sant-awl-banz)

**Sáll[i]sbrˈry** (/ˈsɔlzbru/ sɔwls-brə-ree)

**Sáturnínus**

**Scone** (/skun/; rhymes with loon)

**Sétebòs** (rhymes with floss)

**Séyton** (/ˈsεɪtɔn/ sɛy-tən, like Satan)

**Shréwsbury** (/ˈʃɹʌzbɔːri/ shброz-ər-i; never contracted in Shakespeare)

**Simónidēs**

**Síward**

**Solíus**

**Sómerset** (/ˈsʌmə(ɹ)sət/ sʌmme(ɹ)-sət)

**Sóuth[w]ark** (/ˈsʌðə(ɹ)k/ səth-ə(r)k; ù as in love, th as in bathe)

**Stephano** (MV), Stéphano (Tp.)

**Súffolk** (/ˈsʌfək/ səff-ək; first syllable rhymes with tough)

**Sýcorax**

**Sýracùse**

**Tálbot** (/ˈtɔlbət/ təwl-bət)

**Támora**

**Téarsheet** (/ˈtɛəʃit tɛə-sheet)

**Tháisa** (/ˈtaiˈizəl tie-ée-ə)

**Thál'ard**

**Thames** (/temz/, temmz)

**Thersitēs**

**Thésus** (/ˈeɪsəs/ thē-səs, th as in thin)

**Thísbē** (/ˈəzbi/; rhymes with frisbee)

**Thú’ro**

**Titán’a**

**Trebnón’us**

**Týbalt** (/ˈtɪbəlt/ tɪbbəlt)

**Ulýssēs** (/juˈlɪsiz/ yoo-lis-eez)

**Valéria**

**Váu[gh]än** (/ˈvɔən/ vau-ən)

**Vérges** (rhymes with splurges)

**Virgí’a**

**Volūmn’a**

**Wár[w]ick** (/ˈwɔrklk/ wɔrrikk; first vowel as in porridge, horror)

**Wár[w]ickshire** (/ˈwɔrkʃə/ wɔrk-shə)

**Wéstmoreland** (/ˈwɛstmɔrland/ wɛst-mɔr-land)
Willoughby (/ˈwɪləbi/ will-ə-bi)
Winchester (/ˈwɪntʃəstər/ wɪnt-ʃə-stə)
Wolsey (/ˈwʊlzi/ wʊll-zee)
Worcester (/ˈwʊstər/ wʊss-tə; first syllable rhymes with puss)

Yorick (/ˈjɔrɪk/ yór-ick; first vowel as in porridge, horror)
Appendix C: Stress in Monosyllables

On the whole, stress-assignment in English is a relatively straightforward matter, but it becomes a little more complex where monosyllables are concerned. All lexical monosyllables have A-stress, of course, but some categories of grammatical monosyllables also have A-stress, some have B-stress and others have O-stress. To add to the complexity, many grammatical monosyllables (notably demonstratives, personal pronouns and possessive determiners) are natural attractors of accent: “Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope” (Son. 29.7), “<Thou dost> love her, because thou know’st I love( her, / <And [for my] sake e’en so] doth she abuse( me,” (Son. 42.6-7), or “<Deadly> divorce <step between me and you>!” (AW 5.3.319). Most of the time your ear will guide you in this but for the sake of completeness I include the following chart:

Stress in Monosyllables

1. Major (A) Stress Monosyllables
   a. Nouns: bread, land, peace …
   b. Adjectives: green, good, great …
   c. Main verbs (ie lexical verbs): eat, jump, sing, have [a good time] …
   d. Negative Auxiliary verbs: shan’t, won’t, can’t, don’t.
   e. Derived Auxiliary verbs: dare, ought
   g. Adverbs of:
      i. manner: [he went] fast, [just] so¹ …
      ii. place: here, there …
      iii. time: now, then, soon …
      iv. frequency: once, twice …
      v. direction: [what goes] up [must come] down; [he went] home …

¹ But so as a premodifier is unstressed (“So foul and fair a day”) though often accented (“It was so big!”).
h. Pronouns of the following kinds:
   i. demonstrative: this [is the place], that’s [mine] …
   ii. possessive: [these are] mine, [but] whose [are those?] …
   iii. interrogative: who [is Sylvia?]; what [is she?], where, why …
   iv. quantifier: some [like it hot], few [are chosen], most [don’t wish to be] …

i. Verbal particles: [she made it] up; [I tore it] off …

j. Determiners of the following kinds:
   i. interrogative: which [doctor did you see?] …
   ii. quantifier: all [the President’s men]; [there are] few [ripe ones]; more [people prefer tennis] …

k. Interjections: ah! oh! yes! no! …

2. Minor (B) Stress Monosyllables

   a. Prepositions with associated adverbial functions: by, down, like, off, out, plus, pro, near, next, past, round, save, since, through, till, up.
   b. Prepositions contracted from longer forms: 'gainst, 'twixt, 'fore …
   c. Conjunctions with associated adverbial functions: once, since, till, yet, but.
   d. Wh-subordinators: when [you go]; [I remember] what [you like]; [I don’t care] how [you do it] …
   e. Determiners of the following kinds:
      i. demonstrative: this [royal throne of kings] …
      ii. indefinite: some [fool has parked here] …

3. Weak (O) Stress Monosyllables

   a. Prepositions (other than those listed under 2.a): as, at, but, for, in, of, on, per, than, times, to, with (but see the major stress categories 1.g.v and 1.i).
   b. Conjunctions (other than those listed under 2.b): for, if, nor, or than; both [Bill] and [Jennifer know] that [you gargle] while [you shave] …
   c. Positive Auxiliary verbs: shall, would, may, have [eaten]; is [eating], does [he eat?], etc. Such words frequently attract accent, however: “You shall go to the Ball!”
   d. Pronouns of the following kinds:
      i. personal: I [love] you …
      ii. relative: [The man] who [lives here]; [the dog] that [barked in the night] …
Appendix C: Stress in Monosyllables

e. **Determiners** of the following kinds:

i. possessive: *your* [knee is on] *my* [chest] …

ii. relative: [Bill,] *whose* [uncle runs the bank] …

iii. articles: *the, a, an.*

iv. partitives: [I'd like] *some* [butter]; [is there] *no*² [jam?]

... Since words are classified by function rather than by written form, what looks like the same word may belong to different categories in different grammatical contexts: for example, *have, be* and *do* are major when main verbs but weak as auxiliaries; *that* is major as a demonstrative pronoun, minor as a demonstrative determiner but weak as relative pronoun and subordinating conjunction. Compare the *thats* and *bads* in *He said that that man had had measles* (/hi sed ðæt ðæt mæn hæd hæd mizlz/).

It may seem fiddly to discriminate three categories of stress but the difference between major and minor stress is functional in the metre.³ Minor monosyllables like *'gainst* and *'twixt* have a double valency in the verse, rather like elastic words: if we take a verse like *And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence* (Son. 12.11), the phrase *'gainst Time's scythe* (b-a-A) can count in the metre either as B a-A, producing a strong offbeat (*And no|thing 'gainst| Time's scythe| can make| defence|*) or as Ō-a-A, producing a swap (*And no|thing |[gainst Time's] scythe|*).

² Bearing in mind that *no* as a determiner is by its nature frequently accented: “*There's no business like show business*. The same applies to personal pronouns.

³ Even in the very strictest versification, such as Pope's, minor iambic words like *against* or *between* can occur where major iambic ones can't: Pope can write *And solid pudding defeats empty praise* (Dunciad 1.54) but not *And solid pudding defeats empty praise*. See the examples from Shakespeare at (301) (§7.5).
Appendix D: Select Glossary

Bolded items are cross-referenced within the glossary. An asterisk marks a term or its use as non-traditional.

**Accent**: The rapid deflection of pitch that characterises the most prominent syllable in any tone-unit; it can be used to highlight a contrast, as in “I said Jan, not Jack,” or “Far from being an incentive, it’s a positive disincentive.” See §1.3.

*Adjacent*: Two words separated only by a crack are adjacent. See joined, contiguous, separate. See §1.3.2.

**Alexandrine**: A six-foot (but eight-beat) iambic line. See §6.1.2 and §6.2.8.

**Amphibious section**: A part-line that both completes the previous part-line and initiates a new pentameter (to be completed by the following part-line); see §3.2.1.

**Anapest**: A measure with two offbeats preceding the beat (the first anapest in the line often has only one offbeat). An example of anapestic tetrameter: Why, all| his beha|v'ours did make| their retire| To the court| of his eye|, peeping tho|rough desire|. (LLL 2.1.234-5)

It is not strictly a foot since it is not subject to metrical variations such as reversal and swapping.

**A-Stress**: see Major Stress.

*Available*: Syllables (including half-syllables) are available (to scansion) if they do not follow the last independent in the verse.

*Awkward mapping*: Mapping of inhibited or Ō-syllables onto S-slots. See §2.3.5.

*Balanced line*: A form of prosodic figure. See §2.4.4.

**Beat**: Extra muscular effort in enunciating certain syllables in the utterance, normally recurring at (very) roughly equal intervals of time (isochrony). See §1.5.

**Beat addition**: The placing of a beat on an unstressed unaccented syllable in the performance of an utterance in order to avoid a long run of non-beats. See §1.5.2.

**Break** (symbol: \): A break between tone-units in an utterance. See §1.3.2.
B-Stress: see Minor Stress.

Caesura (symbol: ||): A syntactic break in the line. See §3.1.1.

Catalexis: A w-slot with no syllable associated with it. See jolt, drag and Chapter 4.

Clitic: An unstressed particle, such as a pronoun or preposition, closely attached to and in construction with a neighbouring lexical word: to in to London and it in Eat it are proclitic and enclitic respectively.

*Contiguous: Two words separated only by a flaw or a word-boundary are contiguous. See adjacent, separate.

Contraction: The dropping or eliding of half-vowels in a word; the opposite of expansion. See §1.1.

*Complex metre: In English, a metre that regulates both the number of beats in a performance of the line, and the number of syllable-positions in the verse, but lets the beats slide about in the grid of syllable-positions, like iambic pentameter.

*Compound metre: In English, a metre that regulates both the number of beats in a performance of the line, and the number of syllables occurring between each pair of beats within the line, as in Longfellow’s Hiawatha, or anapestic tetrameter: “O ¹young Lo ₁chin ²var is ₁come ³out of ₁the ²⁴West”.

*Crack (symbol: #): A potential intonation-break. See §1.3.2.

*Cut (symbol: \): An obligatory intonation-break. See §1.3.2.

Demotic verse: Also called simple verse: the insistent, unfooted, chantable four-beat verse of nursery rhymes, protest chants, weather-saws and so on.

*Dominant: A fully stressed (A) syllable.

*Dominate: When a fully stressed (A) syllable dominates an adjoining weak syllable, it prevents it from carrying a beat (and thus from being mapped onto an S-slot). See §1.5.2.

*Drag (symbol: ~): A form of catalexis or missing offbeat where there is no syntactic break (ie at a flaw or join). See §4.2.

Endstopping: Coincidence of a cut with a line-ending. See §3.1.2.

Enjambment (pr. injåmmant): A line whose ending does not coincide with a cut is enjambed. See §3.1.2.

Expansion: Expansion is the full pronunciation of half-vowels in a word; the opposite of contraction.

Extrametrical: A syllable occurring outside the metrical scheme. Some consider tails to be extrametrical.

Feminine epic caesura: An extrametrical weak syllable occurring before a cut in the line. See §2.2.5.
*Flaw (symbol: +): A phrasal boundary that is not a crack because it does not divide a larger unit into possible tone-units; there is a flaw, for example, between a preposition and the noun-phrase it governs: “in + the - garden”. See §1.3.2.

Focus: “Roughly speaking, what is focused in an utterance is understood to be ‘new’ information … what is not focused is understood to be ‘given’ [or background information]” (Selkirk 1986, 200). Focused words or affixes are accented; de-focused ones are not. See §1.3.4.

*Foot: An odd-even pair of syllable-positions in a template. See §2.1.

Complex verse in English permits only disyllabic feet.

*Fracture (symbol: \): A disruptive caesura. See §3.1.1.

*Fragment: A non-pentameter line with fewer than six syllables. See §6.1.1.

*Golden line: A form of prosodic figure. See §2.4.3.

*Half-vowel: A half-vowel is a weak vowel (/ə/ [schwa] or /ɪ/) which may – but need not – be mapped onto a slot in the template, like the middle vowel of dangerous, which may scan as three syllables or as two (dang’rous). See §1.1.1.

*Harsh mapping: Mapping of a-syllables onto S-slots. See §2.3.4.

Headless line: A line with a jolt in the first foot (ie a monosyllabic initial foot), like “^Boot|less home|, and wea|ther-bea|ten back|” (1H4 3.1.66). See §4.1.1.

*Heavy mapping: Mapping of a-syllables onto w-slots. See §2.3.3.

Hesitation: A pause not required or not permitted by the grammar: “Thy mother plays, and I – play too.”

*Impetus marker: A subordinating conjunction, a nominative pronoun with no verb attached, or a transitive verb with no object; these indicate forward momentum for endstopped lines. See §3.1.2.

Iambic: Describes a metrical matrix in which feet consist of an offbeat followed by a beat.

*Independent: A syllable that is neither dominated nor subordinated is called independent, and is represented in the prosodic base by a capital letter (A, B or O). Independent syllables are capable of carrying beats.

*Inhibition (symbol: Ō): Under certain circumstances a weak syllable may be discouraged, though not prevented, from carrying a beat. See §7.2.1.

Intonational phrase: See tone-unit.

Isochrony: Tendency for beats to occur in speech at roughly equal intervals of time. See 1.5.1.

*Join (symbol: -): Two consecutive words linked only by a word-break, not even a flaw, like determiner or adjective and noun, are said to be joined. See §1.3.2.
**Joint** (symbol: ||): A smooth caesura. See §3.1.1.
**Jolt** (symbol: ^): A form of catalexis that occurs within a syntactic break (ie at a cut or – rarely – a crack). See §4.1.
**Lacunae**: Collective term for ‘unoccupied’ syllable-positions (catalexes and rests).
**Lexical stress**: All lexical words – nouns, adjectives, main verbs and derived adverbs – have a syllable that receives accent when the word is uttered in isolation. This syllable is said to carry lexical stress. See 1.2.1.
**Liberation**: The effect of accent on an otherwise dominated or subordinate syllable in rendering it independent. See §7.2.2.
**Light mapping**: Mapping of O-syllables onto S-slots.
**Line**: An utterance of a verse. See §2.1.
**Major [Stress]**: The main stressed syllable of a lexical or dictionary word. See §1.2.2.
**Matrix**: The underlying abstract pattern of a verse-form, consisting of a sequence of identical units such as feet. See §2.1.
**Minor [Stress]**: The stressed syllable of a polysyllabic grammar word or the secondary stressed syllable of a lexical word. See §1.2.3.
**Natural mapping**: Mapping of A-syllables onto S-slots and o-syllables onto w-slots is called ‘natural’.
**Offbeat**: A syllable not carrying a beat in performance.
**Phonology**: The psychological, rule-governed aspect of the perception of sounds in language. What is perceived phonologically (eg lexical stress) need have no actual phonetic representation in any given performance.
**Plonking**: Consistently placing a falling accent on the last major stress in each line. See 1.3.3.
**Prosodic figure**: A sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a recognisable pattern. See §§2.4.3-4.
**Prosody**: The music of speech: rhythm, intonation and so on. See Chapter 1.
**Rest** (symbol: <!>): A silent beat. See §1.5.4 and Chapter 5.
**Restorable**: A restorable is a syllable not normally sounded (in contemporary English) that may nonetheless count in the metre where necessary, like the -ed endings of verbs not ending in /t/ or /d/, or the /i/ of words ending in -ion. See §1.1.5.
**Reversal**: A metrical variation that exchanges w- and S-positions within a foot, so that the beat precedes the offbeat. See §§2.2.1-2.
**Rhotic**: All dialects of English pronounce /r/ before vowel-sounds, but only rhotic ones pronounce it after vowels: thus rice and warrant have /r/ (in some form) in all dialects, but form and war only in rhotic varieties such as Shakespeare’s English, modern Scottish, Devon English or General
American. Non-rhotic varieties include the dialect of Boston and other parts of New England, Australian English, and Educated Southern British English.

Schwa (symbol: ə): The neutral unstressed vowel heard in the first syllable of about or the second of bishop; by far the commonest vowel-sound in English, it is variously spelt with all five vowel-letters. See §1.1.1.

*Separate*: Two words divided by a cut are separate. See adjacent, contiguous.

*Shift*: A prosodic variation. See §2.3.

Silent beat (symbol: <!>): A beat without vocal accompaniment; in iambic pentameter it needs to be indicated by a gesture of some sort in performance. See §1.5.4 and Chapter 5.

*Simple metre*: In English, a metre that regulates only the number of beats in a performance of the line, like that of nursery rhymes or protest chants: “1What do we 2want? 3Ten per 4cent! / 1When do we 2want it? 3Now! 4<!>”. The rhythms of simple metre are not themselves simple.

Single-moulded: A line is single-moulded if it consists of an entire clause or major constituent: “The quality of mercy is not strained”.

Slot: A syllable-position in a template, usually either w[eeak] or S[trong].

Stichomythia (rhymes with pithier): Exchange of single lines in a dialogue. See §3.2.2.

Stress: Inherent phonological prominence in one or more syllables in a word, or relative phonological prominence assigned by the syntactic rules of English. See §1.2.

*Strong offbeat*: A heavy mapping produces a strong (ie a-stressed) offbeat in performance.

Strong syllables: Stressed (ie independent major and minor (A- and B-) syllables and accented syllables of any kind. See §1.2.

Subordination: The weakening of a major stress when immediately preceding another major in the same syntactic constituent. See §1.4.1.

*Super-heavy mapping*: Mapping of A-syllables onto w-slots. See §2.3.3.

*Super-strong offbeat*: A super-heavy mapping produces a super-strong (ie A-stressed) offbeat in performance. See §2.3.3.

*Swap*: A metrical variation or switch that exchanges w and S positions between neighbouring feet. See §§2.2.3–4.

*Switch*: A metrical variation (a swap or a reversal) that creates a new template by altering the sequence of syllable-slots. See §2.2.

Synalépha: Also called contraction: the process whereby two adjacent vowels become one, as in 't'entry, 'fi'ry. See §1.1.4.
Sýncope: Also called contraction: the process whereby a weak vowel is dropped after the major and before another weak syllable beginning with a frictionless continuant, as in dang’rous, marv’ling, en’my. See §1.1.4.

Synerésis: Also called contraction: the process whereby a weak vowel (either /i/ or /u/) is dropped immediately before another vowel, becoming a semi-vowel (/y/ or /w/), as in tedious or consensual. See §1.1.4.

*Tail: An extra offbeat on the end of a line, often called a ‘feminine ending’. See §2.2.5.

*Template: An abstract metrical pattern derived from a matrix. See §2.2.

*Terminal closure: the degree of syntactic closure at the end of a line (in Shakespeare’s verse, lines end in either a cut, a crack, or a flaw). See §3.1.2.

Tetrámeter: A line of four feet.

Tone-unit: A tone-unit is a phrase that carries a single intonational ‘tune’; any complete utterance must consist of one or more tone-units. To illustrate: if I say They left hopefully with one tone-unit, hopefully is an adverbial adjunct and means ‘with hope’; if I say They left, \\ hopefully with two tone-units, hopefully becomes dissociated from the verb and functions instead as a disjunct or ‘commenting’ adverbial (“I hope that they left”). See §1.3.2.

Tonic syllable: the syllable in dictionary words which, in isolation, carries major stress

Trimeter: A line consisting of three feet. See §6.1.1.

*Verse: A sequence of syllables corresponding to the largest domain in which metrical rules can operate (that is, from line-ending to line-ending); a verse is the raw material for the utterance of a line. See §2.1.

Vocative: A noun phrase demarcated by cuts, used in hailing or identifying the person spoken to, as in “Bill, come here!” Vocatives in Shakespeare can be highlighted by a number of metrical and prosodic devices, including reversals, jolts, rests and speech-initial fragments.

Weak beat: A light mapping produces a weak (ie unstressed) beat in performance.

Weak syllable: An unstressed and unaccented syllable. See §1.2.5.
Appendix E:
A List of Symbols used in Scansion

| vertical solidus: marks the end of a normal foot
|| double vertical solidus: denotes a break or caesura
\ double reverse solidus: denotes a disruptive caesura, or fracture
< > angle brackets: enclose a reversed foot
< | combination: encloses a reversible foot
[ ] square brackets: enclose the syllables involved in a swap
|() vertical solidus followed by left lunette (bracket): marks a tail or ‘feminine ending’
/ solidus (or virgule, or forward slash): indicates where a line is broken between two speakers
\ back-slash (or reverse solidus): marks a cut (a major break in intonation)
† dagger: obligatory intonational break
# hash-sign: marks a crack (a potential break in intonation)
+ plus-sign: marks a flaw (a syntactic juncture where no intonational break is possible)
⇒ small arrow: onward semantic pressure for endstopped lines that include an impetus marker.
± underlined plus-sign: marks a flaw due to a demoted crack
^ caret: marks a jolt
:: two colons: means ‘versus’
~ tilde: marks a drag at a join
≈ double tilde: marks a drag at a flaw
<!> marks a rest
… ellipsis: at the beginning of a verse indicates that the first part of the pentameter has been ellipted
S a slot in the template that must be filled by an independent (beatable) syllable
S an S-slot (illegally) occupied by a dominated syllable
s  a slot in the template that must be filled by a subordinated stress
w  a slot in the template that may be filled by any kind of syllable
W  a slot in the template that must be filled by an inhibited syllable
A  a fully stressed major syllable (a ‘dominant’)
a  a major syllable with subordinated stress
B  a fully stressed minor syllable
b  a minor syllable with subordinated stress
O  an independent unstressed syllable
o  a dominated unstressed syllable
œ  an elidible: a weak syllable that need not be mapped onto a slot
Ô  an inhibited syllable
Ô  an accented unstressed syllable
Appendix F:
A List of Abbreviations

AC — Antony and Cleopatra
ALC — A Lover’s Complaint
AW — All’s Well That Ends Well
AYL — As You Like It
CE — The Comedy of Errors
Cor. — Coriolanus
Cym. — Cymbeline
Ham. — Hamlet
1H4 — Henry IV, Part 1
2H4 — Henry IV, Part 2
H5 — Henry V
1H6 — Henry VI, Part 1
2H6 — Henry VI, Part 2
3H6 — Henry VI, Part 3
H8 — Henry VIII
JC — Julius Caesar
KJ — King John
KL — King Lear
LLL — Love’s Labour’s Lost
Mac. — Macbeth
MAN — Much Ado About Nothing
MM — Measure for Measure
MV — The Merchant of Venice
MND — A Midsummer Night’s Dream
MWW — The Merry Wives of Windsor
Oth. — Othello
Per. — Pericles Prince of Tyre
R2 — Richard II
R3 — Richard III
RL — The Rape of Lucrece
RJ — Romeo and Juliet
Son. — Sonnets
Tp. — The Tempest
Tim. — Timon of Athens
Tit. — Titus Andronicus
TC — Troilus and Cressida
TN — Twelfth Night
TGV — The Two Gentlemen of Verona
TNK — The Two Noble Kinsmen
TS — The Taming of the Shrew
VA — Venus and Adonis
WT — The Winter’s Tale

F1 — ‘The First Folio’; ie Mr William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories & Tragedies. Published according to the True Original Copies (London, 1623)

OED — the Oxford English Dictionary
Q1 — The first quarto edition of the play in question; Q2, the second (etc.).

TLN — Through-Line Numbering (a system that numbers every printed line in F1, starting anew for each work)
References


How did Shakespeare intend that his plays be read?

*Rhythm and Meaning in Shakespeare* explores the rhythmical organisation of Shakespeare’s verse and how it creates and reinforces meaning both in the theatre and in the mind of the reader. Because metrical form in the pentameter is not passively present in the text but rather something that the performer must co-operatively re-create in speaking it, pentameter is what John Barton calls “stage-direction in shorthand”, a supple instrument through which Shakespeare communicates valuable cues to performance. This book is thus an essential guide for actors wishing to perform in his plays, as well as a valuable resource for anyone wishing to enhance their understanding of and engagement with Shakespeare’s verse.

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