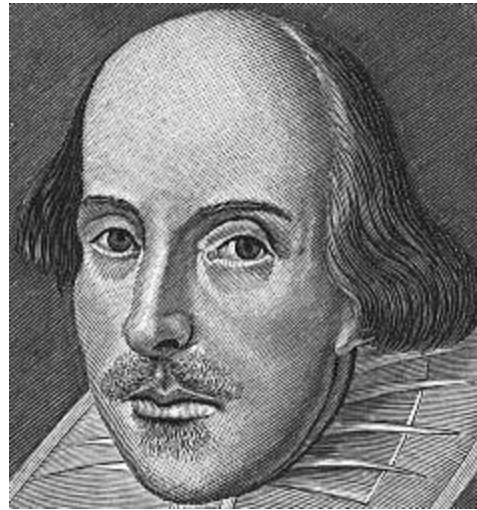


# Shakespearean Verse



Scansion: Meaning and the Actor's Guide

# Language is the key...

- very limited stage sets
- very limited special effects
- very few stage directions in the text

ALL of this information had to be conveyed through the LANGUAGE

# Shakespearean Vocabulary

- HUGE
- Used between 17 and 26 THOUSAND different words in his plays and poems

# Shakespearean Vocabulary

- “invented” over 1700 words like
  - bet
  - obscene
  - puking
  - lonely
  - torture
  - arouse
  - eyeball
  - swagger

# Who attends a play?

AUDIENCE

What's the root word?

Latin: *audentia* ... to listen

So... Listening was of **PRIME IMPORTANCE**

# The Actor's Dilemma

What am I saying?  
What am I feeling?

How do I remember  
all those lines?



**Hamlet the character  
has over 1500 lines  
(the play has over  
3700 lines).**

# Is it easier to remember paragraphs or songs?

Yesterday, the New York Times reported that Ernest Hemingway may have produced as many as 47 endings to his midcareer masterpiece, *A Farewell to Arms*. The so-called "Nada Ending," for instance, which is No. 1: 'That is all there is to the story.

Catherine died and you will die and I will die and that is all I can promise you.' " And the "Live-Baby Ending," No. 7: "There is no end except death and birth is the only beginning.' "



# Is it easier to remember paragraphs or songs?

*Stylin', while in  
Livin' it up in the city  
Got Chucks on with Saint Laurent  
Got kiss myself I'm so pretty*

*I'm too hot (hot damn)  
Called a police and a fireman  
I'm too hot (hot damn)  
Make a dragon wanna retire, man*

# Why?

Songs have rhythm (and often rhyme)... so do poems.

Reading a poem for rhythm and meter is called **SCANSION**.

# Feet

A poetic “foot” is a multi-syllable “chunk” of the line that has a particular order of stress

- iamb: unstressed followed by stressed.  
Examples: aRISE, aGAINST, reSPECT
- trochee: stressed followed by unstressed.  
Examples: WINdow, NOthing, TWINKle
- spondee: two consecutive stressed.  
Examples: HEART-STRINGS
- Other feet: anapest, dactyl... and more

# Scansion markings

- ∪ **unstressed syllable**
- / **stressed syllable**
- | **break between feet**
- || **caesura (pause)**
- ^ **missing element**
- ∩ **usually unstressed syllable**
- ∪ **usually stressed syllable**

# Meter

“Meter” refers to the number of “feet” in a line of poetry.

- One foot: Monometer
- Two feet: Dimeter
- Three feet: Trimeter
- Four feet: Tetrameter
- Five feet: Pentameter

# Blank verse

- UNrhymed iambic pentameter
- five unstressed/stressed feet per line...
- ten syllables per line
- baBUMP baBUMP baBUMP baBUMP baBUMP

**The Sound of the Human Heart**

# **An Exercise**

I need ten volunteers...

## **Ex. 1: *Romeo and Juliet***

ROMEO

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

Be not her maid, since she is envious;

Her vestal livery is but sick and green

And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

It is my lady, O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!



## Ex. 1: *Romeo and Juliet*

ROMEO

regular iambic  
pentameter line

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trochee

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two syllables skurred  
as one (elision):  
Juliet = jewel - yet

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livery = liv-ry

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

spondee

Be not her maid, since she is envious;

all three syllables...  
en-vi-ous  
why?

Her vestal livery is but sick and green

And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

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regular iambic pentameter line

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all three syllables...  
en-vi-ous  
why?

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And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

It is my lady, O, it is my love!

only three feet (six syllables)... two-beat pause... WHY?

could be either trochees OR spondees...

O, that she knew she were!

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

Her eye discourses; I will answer it.

I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:

See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET

Ay me!

ROMEO

She speaks:

awkward  
rhythms:  
Romeo is  
confused  
and lacks  
confidence...

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

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Ay me!

**three lines?**

ROMEO

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That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET

Ay me!

**three lines?**

ROMEO

No, count the syllables.

She speaks:

awkward  
rhythms:  
Romeo is  
confused  
and lacks  
confidence...

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

Her eye discourses; I will answer it.

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See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET Ay me!

three lines?

ROMEEO She speaks:

No, count the syllables.

ONE iambic pentameter line...  
to be spoken WITHOUT PAUSES!  
(they're sharing a heartbeat!)

## **Ex. 2: *Hamlet***

HAMLET

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 heart-ache 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;

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feminine endings;  
extra unstressed  
syllables at the  
end of lines trail off  
from what could  
be strong endings...  
the extra syllables  
lead us to see that  
Hamlet has too  
many thoughts  
going through his  
head!

## Ex. 2: Hamlet

HAMLET

trochee

spondee

the rhythm of the opening of the speech is irregular and disjointed, showing confusion.

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;

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The heart-ache 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;

feminine endings; extra unstressed syllables at the end of lines trail off from what could be strong endings... the extra syllables lead us to see that Hamlet has too many thoughts going through his head!

could be either iambs OR spondees...

too many thoughts?

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;  
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;  
. . . .  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

this line has only 8 syllables...

Must give us pause: there's the respect

why?

That makes calamity of so long life;

The actor needs to take a breath... the next sentence covers 13 lines!

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution

awkward rhythms;  
his resolution really is "sicklied o'er"...

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

again, feminine endings

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,

And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!

he's interrupted (someone walks in on him); it happens quickly... no pause (10 syllables)

# Conclusion

Shakespeare can be difficult...

but with WORK--including **listening** and **saying the words aloud**--you *can* understand the language and the mental/emotional state of the characters (not to mention the stage directions)