

Speak the Speech:

Analyzing and Unlocking Shakespearean Text for Performance

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Agenda

- How we will work: discussion, individual application, share your work, discuss the outcome
- The Tools we'll be exploring:
 - Paraphrase
 - Original Punctuation & Spelling
 - Scansion
 - Other Hints & Clues
 - Repetition of words
 - Repetition of sounds
 - Antithesis/Weighting of opposites
 - Rhyme
 - Modes of address
 - Embedded stage directions
 - Candidate words for imagery
 - Candidate words for tone color
 - Speech Measures (for Prose)

What is this class?

This is a class in “table work” for Shakespearean text. It can also be thought of as mining the text for clues as to what is going on and ways to make that information clear to your audience. These are some of the tools and concepts which I find useful.

How will this class work?

We'll each start by reading the chosen lines aloud, to establish our baseline.

We will then work through a set of tools. For each tool, we will:

- Discuss the tool and how it is applied
- Individually apply that tool to our chosen text. Feel free to ask for help or ideas!
- Read the piece aloud, emphasizing the tool. Then we may as a group discuss what if anything is suggested about the character or situation based on the information from that tool.
- Read the piece one more time, without specifically emphasizing the tool, to see how awareness of the information affects the speech.

When you are commenting on other students' work, please keep the comments specific and descriptive. What did you hear? What did it suggest to you?

These readings are NOT performances, so hold your applause to the end of class.

This is a time of work. There's no audience to impress. It is a safe space, where you can take risks and see what happens.

Tool #1: Direct Paraphrase/Word-for-Word Paraphrase

Replace (almost) all the words in the piece. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Even if you know what the original word means - replace it.

Generally ignore proper nouns, pronouns, and conjunctions. Match the word order. If a word has multiple meanings, you may be able to find one choice that covers all the ones you think apply for this character in the moment, or you can write in a few options if you can't pick.

If a word is repeated, you might repeat the same word in your paraphrase OR choose a different word to paraphrase. If you are working with other actors, it can be fun to use the same word that they did or switch it AND in-character point out the different meaning.

If you can retain a rhyme, sweet - but don't work too hard to preserve it.

Useful Tools for Paraphrasing

- A good thesaurus. Online version is at <https://merriam-webster.com/thesarus>
- The Lexicon, Vol 1 & 2 (Alexander Schmidt)
- Shakespeare's Words (David Crystal and Ben Crystal)
- Oxford English Dictionary
- Sparknotes and other modern analysis (use in moderation)



Link to Merriam-Webster's
Thesaurus

Other Kinds of Paraphrasing

It can also be helpful to do what I call an **expanded paraphrase**, digging in to the text AS WELL AS the subtext for each line. Unlike in a word-for-word paraphrase, you can use as much text as you want to express each idea, expanding on the connections and references being made. This is helpful from an acting perspective, but I tend to save it for later in my process as it muddies the text-specific work early on.

Paraphrasing in Practice

Original Text

How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know:
And as her errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities:

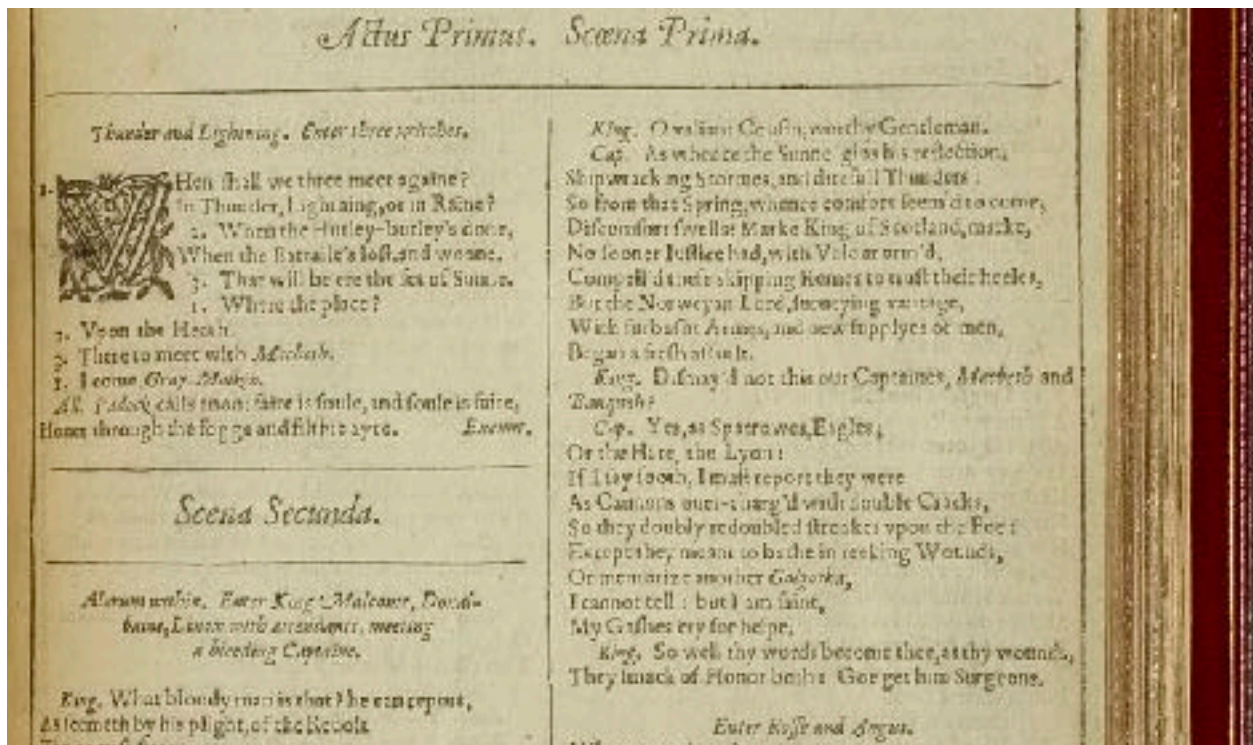
Paraphrased Text

How joyful one person compared to another person can be!
Everyone in our city says I am as beautiful as Hermia.
But what does that matter? My love doesn't think it's true;
He refuses to see what everyone but him sees clearly:
And that same error he is committing, stanning Hermia's peepers,
I'm making too, stanning HIS features:

Tool #2: Punctuation & Spelling

In Shakespeare's era, spelling and punctuation were not standardized as they are today. This allowed an author to provide specific hints and guidelines on how they intended a line to be read, what sounds should be included in a word, etc, via the punctuation. Unfortunately, modern copies of Shakespeare have gone through editors - sometimes many iterations of editors - trying to 'standardize' the spelling and punctuation for a modern reader. This can drastically alter the meaning and feeling of a piece.

When I get Shakespearean text, one of the first things I do is check the punctuation, spelling, and capitalization against the First Folio and/or Quarto editions.



First page of Macbeth, from a copy of the First Folio held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. Used with permission.

The original copies are not the easiest to read, but there are other options. My favorite is *The Applause First Folio in Modern Text*, which is wonderful although it can be somewhat difficult to acquire.

Actus primus	
ENTER THESEUS, HIPPOLITA, WITH OTHERS	
<p>Theseus Now faire Hippolita, our nuptiall houre Drawes on apace: foure happy daies bring in Another Moon: but oh, me thinks, how slow This old Moon wanes; She lingers my desires Like to a Step-dame, or a Dowager, Long withering out a yong mans revennew,</p> <p>Hippolita Foure daies will quickly steep themselves in nights Foure nights will quickly dreame away the time: And then the Moone, like to a silver how, Now bent in heaven, shal behold the night Of our solemnities.</p> <p>Theseus Go Philostrate, Stirre up the Athenian youth to merriments, Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth, Turne melancholy forth to Funerals; The pale companion is not for our pompe, Hippolita, I woo'd thee with my sword, And wonne thy love, doing thee injuries: But I will wed thee in another key, With pompe, with triumph, and with revelling.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ENTER HERMIA AND HER DAUGHTER HERMIA, LYCANDER</p>	<p>With cunning hast thou fish'd my daughters heart, Turn'd her obedience (which is due to me) To stubborne harshnesse. And my gracious Duke, Be it so she will not heere before your Grace, Consent to marrie with Demetrius. I beg the ancient priviledge of Athens; As she is mine, I may dispose of her; Which shall be either to this Gentleman, Or to her death, according to our Law, Immediately provided in that case.</p> <p>Theseus What say you Hermia? be advis'd faire Maide, To you your Father should be as a God; One that compos'd your beauties; yea and one To whom you are but as a forme in waxe By him imprinted: and within his power, To leave the figure, or disfigure it: Demetrius is a worthy Gentleman,</p> <p>Hermia So is Lysander.</p> <p>Theseus In himselfe he is, But in this kinde, wanting your fathers voyce, The other must be held the worthier.</p> <p>Hermia I would my father look'd but with my eyes,</p>

First page of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, from the Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type: Comedies, Histories & Tragedies

Provided Text from the director

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days brings in
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

First Folio version

Now faire Hippolyta, our nuptiall houre
Draws on apace: foure happy daies bring in
Another Moon: but oh, me thinks, how slow
This old Moon wanes; She lingers my desires
Like to a Step-dame, or a Dowager,
Long withering out a yong mans revennew.

'My' Version

Now fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another Moon: but oh, me thinks, how slow
This old Moon wanes; She lingers my desires
Like to a Step-dame, or a Dowager,
Long withering out a young mans revenue.

Tool #3: Scansion

Shakespeare is written in 2 modes: verse and prose. Verse usually appears in Iambic Pentameter: 'Bah-DUM bah-DUM bah-DUM bah-DUM bah-DUM'.

Each of these 'bah-dum's is an "Iamb". Since there are five iambs or measures: "Penta + meter". Iambic Pentameter.

How to scan a line:

- Start with any words that have multiple syllables. Which syllables are stressed?
- Are there any other syllables which are stressed?
- Fill in the rest of the line. Does it follow Iambic Pentameter? Are there extra syllables or too few? Does it share iambs with a previous character's line, or the next line?
- Say it aloud, tapping on a table or your leg for the stressed syllables. Does it sound and feel correct?

And therefore level not to hit their lives.

RICHARD III

You have a daughter called Elizabeth.

Virtuous and fair, royal and gracious.

ELIZABETH

And must she die for this? O, let her live,

♀ And I'll corrupt her Manners, stain her Beauty,
Slander my self, as false to Edward's bed;

Throw over her the veil of Infamy,

♀ So she may live unscarred of bleeding slaughter,

♀ I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.

RICHARD III

Wrong not her birth, she is [of royal blood].

ELIZABETH

To save her life, I'll say she is not so.

RICHARD III

Her life is {only} safest in her birth.

ELIZABETH

♀ And only in that safety died her Brothers.

RICHARD III

You speak as if that I had slain my cousins.

ELIZABETH

No doubt the murderous knife was dull and blunt,

Till it was whetted on thy stone-hard heart,

To revel in the Entrails of my Lambs.

Example of scansion & punctuation from Richard III, as written by
Jacqueline Chenault as Elizabeth in the 2021 production by Brave Spirits Theatre
2024.08

Pennsic 51: Pennsic University
Mistress Marguerite Honoree d'Cheneau

Why do we scan text?

We scan to emphasize when the rhythm is regular, and to figure out where (and then WHY) we are breaking that regularity. Those breaks give insight into character, emotion, mindset, etc.

How do we break pentameter? A few common ones:

- **Amphibrach (aka 'feminine ending')**. An extra unstressed syllable at the end of the line. Can indicate disorganized thought or a loss of control, especially when a soliloquy has many of them scattered throughout.
- **Trochee, especially trochaic inversions**. The iamb is reversed. (BAH-dum instead of bah-DUM). At the start of a line it gives more oomph, or in the middle of the line it might come after a comma or mid-line end of thought to indicate a shift or a change in tactic or idea.
- **Alexandrian Line**. An extra full iamb on the line. The idea was so big or so intense it couldn't be contained. Leaves the listener hanging, surprised.
- **Missing Feet**. When the line is less than 5 iambs (exception is when characters are performing magic, e.g. *Midsummer*, *Tempest*, and *Macbeth*, which often uses 4 iambs to leave a little energy hanging off at each line). Usually an invitation for a pause or some kind of action or moment to fill the space. Maybe the character is pulling themselves together, or is crying, or laughing, or revealing a wound they've made on their thigh...
- **Shared lines**. When the line is short one or more iambs, BUT the previous or next line which is spoken by another character is also short and contains the missing number of iambs. This is a shared line and the line should be topped/the energy carried between the two characters. They might be cooperating, or it might be an interruption, or whatever makes sense for those two characters in that moment. Note that shared lines may ALSO have missing feet, indicating some kind of pause. In those cases the two actors and director need to decide when the pause happens and why it is there.

Other things to look for when scanning:

- **Monosyllabic lines**. This is a line with exactly 10 words, all of which have only one syllable. Generally it's a sign to SLOW DOWN and USE EACH WORD to the fullest.
- **Enjambed lines vs end-stopped lines**. Do ideas carry through multiple lines, sometimes ending in the middle of a line, or are the end-stopped with a period or other punctuation ending the idea at the end of the line (this is one reason that the punctuation exercise REALLY matters). Very smart characters might use enjambment, or folks who are very worked up. If a character is usually enjambed but then changes during a certain speech (or vice versa), that might be another indication of their state of mind.

Additional Tools: Other things to watch for

- **Repetition of Words.** This could be the same word in a line, e.g. 'Words, words, words', repetition of the same word in a speech, e.g. 'To die, to sleep, no more/And by a sleep to say...', or could even be shared by different characters.
 - Each repetition means something, either harking back to the previous instance, doubling down on meaning, or bringing a different element to the forefront. You have to decide WHY they repeat, and make that meaning (and difference for each one) clear.
 - One of the hardest I've seen worked on is from As You Like it: "Oh wonderful wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful, and yet again wonderful, and after that out of all whooping".
- **Repetition of Sounds.** This can occur in the consonants (alliteration) as well as vowels (assonance). When it appears, it's an invitation to pull out and linger on those sounds, really using them to tie the sense of the line or phrase together.
- **Antithesis.** The weighing of opposites. This shows up CONSTANTLY in Shakespeare. Highlight these in your performance when they appear, as they can be critical to the audience's understanding of the work. The easiest way to train this is to practice the line with two hands and gesture with each, meaning 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand'. Example: "As I am a man, my state is desperate for my master's love. As I am a woman, oh alas the day, what thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?".
- **Rhyme.** Rhymes in Shakespeare are NEVER an accident. Look for rhyming couplets, which can signal the end of a scene or call attention to an exit. If they are in the middle of the scene, why? Was the character trying to end the scene? Why didn't it end?
 - Often the King or highest ranking character ends the scene with a rhyming couplet. If there's a very high ranked character onstage but someone else has the couplet... what's going on?
 - Sometimes rhymes work in Original Pronunciation but are lost in modern English.
 - Sometimes there are sonnets embedded in a line - usually a sign that the character is besotted. The classic example is Beatrice in Much Ado, beginning with "What fire is in mine ears..."

- **Modes of address.** Are characters addressing each other as ‘thee’ or ‘you’? “Thee” and “thou” were *informal*, so using them indicates familiarity, comfort, and perhaps a laxity in rules.
- **Embedded Stage Directions.** There are almost no actual stage directions written in Shakespeare... or are there? They are sometimes embedded into the lines: “Then here, upon my knee, before High Heaven and you...”, “Let us sit up on the ground, and tell sad stories of the deaths of Kings”.

Bonus Tool: Speech Measures

Many of the tools we've discussed require verse and scansion. Speech measures are a technique to tackle prose with the same focus and stress on specific words.

A "speech measure" is a specific thought or topic in a set of lines. Each will have an objective, 'to _____', ideally a single and descriptive word.

Speech measures often - but not always - follow punctuation. They are similar to measures in music in that they are small, specific chunks that together form the whole. Each has a single word - JUST ONE - which is the most important word. If you feel two words in a measure should be underlined, they are in two DIFFERENT measures. Remember measures are quite small.

Measures are marked by surrounding each measure with brackets. ([a measure][another measure]). Underline the most important word in each measure.

Each measure should be delivered to a specific person, image of a person, or personification - including a specific person in the audience. ONLY shift focus from one person to another between measures.

Additional Resources

- A good thesaurus. Online option is at <https://merriam-webster.com/thesarus>
- Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary: A Complete Dictionary of All the English Words, Phrases, and Constructions in the Works of the Poet, Vol 1 & 2 (Alexander Schmidt)
- Shakespeare's Words (David Crystal and Ben Crystal)
- The Eloquent Shakespeare: A Pronouncing Dictionary for the Complete Dramatic Works with Notes to Untie the Modern Tongue (Gary Logan)
- Oxford English Dictionary
- Actions: The Actor's Thesaurus
- Freeing Shakespeare's Voice: The Actor's Guide to Talking the Text (Kristin Linklater)