INTRA

Interactive Tutorial on Rhythm Analysis

1 - The Purposes of this Tutorial

Traditionally, rhythmic analysis, or SCANSION as it is often called, has been taught, when considered at all, as a dusty science of accents, Greek names and abstruse principles of metrical variation. The relevance of scansion to the reading and understanding of poetry has often seemed arbitrary or irrelevant, especially as formalist criticism was eclipsed in the 1980s and 90s by various forms of post-structuralist criticism that are more interested in the historical and cultural situatedness of authors and texts than in the representation and weightedness of syllables. While literary critics, in small numbers, have continued to apply older forms of metrical analysis to texts, the most exciting work on rhythm has been done by scholars interested in understanding rhythm in the broadest ways possible, including its temporal, cognitive and hermeneutical significance. While this tutorial cannot explain these developments fully (this is Poetry and Poetics, not Rhythm 101), they nonetheless underlie the approach taken here.

Many traditional approaches tend to see rhythm simply as an aspect of poetry that, like imagery or symbolism, is simply one more element of the poem that the interpreter enlists to give a reading of the poem's themes and speaker. Behind this kind of reading of poetry in general and rhythm in particular is the notion that poems aim to present us with a referential world created through a fictionalized speaker. In such a world, rhythm is usually taken as a means of underlining, supporting, framing, elaborating and shaping what we know about the speaker through other means (DM 2). Hence, rhythm is a subsidiary aspect of language, commandeered to show what the reader has already determined that the poem is "about." In contrast, this tutorial aims to equip you with some of the tools necessary to come to a different understanding of rhythm and of poetry. Following the work of Richard Cureton, I will assume that "rhythm creates times" (DM 3) and that what the poem is about is less the externalized content proferred by the fictional speaker and more about verse form. Rather than looking at rhythm only as a kind of semantic reinforcement, we will attempt to see rhythm as a means of creating time and thus as mapping human interiority and cognition.

2 - Some Introductory Concepts and Terms

To come to an understanding of how rhythm creates time, it is necessary to make clear what is meant by "rhythm," as well as a set of companion terms, "prosody" and "versification," that have been used variably and sometimes interchangeably, leading inevitably to confusion (DM 3). The central concern of PROSODY is prominence and non-prominence and it involves linguistic features such as stress, syllabification, quantity, phrasing and intonation. To give an example, to which we will return shortly in more detail, STRESS is simply the prominence given to certain syllables in a sequence. It is this prominence that allows us to determine the difference, both rhythmic and semantic, between these two phrases, "the white house" and "the White House." The first is a noun phrase with the strongest stress falling on house; the second is a compound noun with the strongest stress on "White." The prominence studied by prosody can be seen as parallel to types of prominence in other domains of language, including "phrasing in syntax, subordination in discourse, and deductive argumentation in rhetoric" (DM 4). Thus, we can begin to see that rhythm is not simply a limited aspect of poetry or more narrowly, of metrical poetry, but a or perhaps, the central feature of language.

If prosody provides the grammar of rhythm, VERSIFICATION"deals with those conventionalized language patterns that develop in specific cultural traditions in order to enable (and constrain) poetic composition" (DM 4). In English we most often refer to these conventionalized patterns as METERSwhich involve "the perception of beats into regular patterns" (A, BM 11). It's important to realize that our perception as readers of the regularly recurring beats operates despite the fact that the language meter orders frequently does not correspond directly to the prosodic structure of the language. That is, prosodic ordering and versificational or metrical ordering, as well as rhythmic phrasing which we'll come to in a moment, are related but distinct. Part of the pleasure of reading poetry is our ability to experience and understand this complex interaction among these orders. But because students and critics often think that to have identified the meter of a poem is to have understood its rhythm, it's worthwhile to spend a moment here at the outset, with the distinction between prosody and versification.

You have each, perhaps unknowingly, been aware of the difference between prosody and versificational structure since an early age. If you think through the most common nursery rhymes, for instance, "Humpty Dumpty," you will see that we maintain a strong sense of four recurring beats in every line, despite the fact that the number of syllables occurring between beats is variable. I have marked each metrical beat below the line with a "B." Above the line I have indicated the initial prosodic domain by marking each stressed or strong syllable with an "s" and each unstressed or weak syllable with a "w." Throughout the nursery rhyme, the beats fall on stressed syllables.

(1)

```
 s   w  s   w  s  w  w  s
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
```

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 B      B      B        B

 s   w  s   w  s  w   w    s
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
 B      B      B          B

s    w   w      s  w   w   s   w   w      s
All the king's horses and all the king's men,
B               B          B             B

 s    w   w   s   w  w s  w  w  s
Couldn't put Humpty together again.
 B            B        B        B
```

Each pair of lines has the same pattern of unstressed syllables between beats but notice that the two pairs differ from one another, with the second pair seemingly speeding up the action with the triple rhythm created by double unstressed syllables between stressed ones. Despite the differences in their prosody, we tend to hear the lines as ISOCHRONOUS, that is, as taking the same amount of time between beats. We hurry and slow down the pulses between the beats to fit the constraints of the meter.

Another striking example of the way the prosodic structures of language are organized by versification is the English COMMON METER. Common meter, used for many hymns, BALLADS and nursery rhymes, consists of alternating lines of IAMBIC TETRAMETER and IAMBIC TRIMETER (an iamb is an unstressed or weak syllable (w) followed by a stressed or strong one (s)). A trimeter consists of three of these units in a line; a tetrameter of four. In the following anonymous, traditional example (taken from A, PR 58), the poem is written in QUATRAINS, i.e., four line stanzas of these alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines. As in Example 1, the metrical beats are marked below the line with a "B" and the stress is shown above the line.

(2)

```
w  s    w    s    w   s   w  s
A man whose name was Johnny Sands
   B         B        B      B

 w   s   w   s  w  s
Had married Betty Haig,
     B       B     B        (B)

 w    s     w    s      w   s    w   s
And though she brought him gold and lands,
      B          B          B        B

 w    s    w  s   w     s
She proved a terrible plague.
      B       B         B           (B)
```

If you recite this poem aloud, perhaps clapping to keep the beat, you'll see that the gravitational pull of the four-beat line is so great that we automatically add a fourth beat in the trimeter lines. Such implied beats are commonly called unrealized, unvoiced or silent beats (DM 4) despite the fact that nothing in the actual verse

corresponds to this beat. Thus, not only is it possible that meter and prosody may be distinct from one another, there also may be meter without any actual VERSE INSTANCE at all.

RHYTHM is "a global term covering all relations of strength and weakness" (BM 11). Therefore, like prosody, it involves prominence but rhythmic events are distinguished by phrasing or grouping which is relative and hierarchical (RPEV 121; DM 4). The hierarchical quality of rhythm is essential. "A rhythm consists of a series of local events, perceived as more or less prominent elements within longer events, which are themselves perceived as more or less prominent elements within even longer events" (BM 11). While we will work much more extensively with phrasing and hierarchy later on, it's worth noting here that rhythmic phrasing rather than meter will turn out to be the most interesting and important dimension of poetry, the area where we will most clearly see how rhythm creates time and gives it meaning. For rhythmic phrasing involves ever larger groupings, moving from syllables, words, phrases and lines gradually up to the poem as a whole. Further, we will see that phrasing and meter are often strongly opposed to one another. While meter is "physical, continuous, repetitive, rigid, local, and retrospective," phrasing is "emotive, divisive, shaped, flexible, and centering / climactic" (DM 6). Indeed, it is rhythmic phrasing, with its emphasis on anticipation, prolongation and arrival, rather than meter that gives readers the distinctive sense of voice in a given poem. Our task as readers and one of the fundamental aims of this tutorial is to understand how that voice takes shape and form.

Having provided you with a sense of the aims of rhythmic analysis and some basic terms and concepts, we will revisit prosody, meter and rhythmic phrasing each in turn to develop your conceptual and analytical tools. In each section there will be self-checking exercises for you to practice and use that will allow you to monitor your understanding. The aim will be to move you from the simple to the complex, from individual syllables and words to whole poems, from the rules of phonology to complex, multi-faceted interpretation of poems.

3 - Prosody

3.1 - Some Words of Caution and Encouragement

For the purposes of understanding rhythm, the most important aspect of prosody is stress, or the prominence given to certain syllables. Despite the fact that all of you using this tutorial are native or competent English speakers, one of the biggest hurdles for many Poetry and Poetics students is becoming analytically cognizant of what you say daily without thinking. It is not unusual, in my experience, to find numerous students who can correctly pronounce a word in every day conversation or reading but who cannot assign stress values correctly. So, first, don't panic, if you are uncertain or make mistakes. Second, and this cannot be said enough, READ POEMS ALOUD, read words and phrases aloud, listen to others read; even when you must read silently,

do so with an awareness of your physical voice. This encouragement comes with a caveat--remember that your scansion assumes the most neutral pronunciation of words and phrases. In this sense, a scansion is not a blueprint for performance. You might very well, in reading and interpreting, choose to accent a word more emphatically but any dramatic emphases still have underlying them the syntactic and phonological rules you will be practicing here. Third, use the dictionary. All words in it have stress properly marked, though as you'll see when we discuss the RHYTHM RULE the stress of a word in isolation may alter because of its context. And last, use the linguistic rules I'm giving you, remembering that these rules explain not only how stress works but its syntactic basis. The rules begin with words and then move to phrases.

3.2 - Some Prosodic Rules

3.2.1 - Words

The stress or prominence given to a certain syllable is usually dependent on pitch, duration or length, and amplitude or loudness. Of these pitch is the most important but all of them act as intensifying features. Syntactically speaking, words are either content words or function words. "Content words are words which operate with a certain degree of independence, conveying a full meaning by themselves. They are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Most of the words in the dictionary are content words. Function words are words that depend on other words for their meaning, usually indicating some kind of relation. They include prepositions, articles, demonstratives, conjunctions, pronouns, and auxiliaries" (PR 27-28).

3.2.2 - Using Tree Structures to Understand Stress

Most monosyllabic (single syllable) content words have a stress (e.g., clock, red, run). Simple polysyllabic (more than one syllable) words may have only one stress, e.g., rabbit, but more complicated words may have more than one stress. Since stress is both relative and hierarchical, one of the most persuasive ways of both understanding and representing stress in such words is through what is called tree notation. Adopted from GENERATIVE LINGUISTICS, especially the work of Liberman (1975) and Kiparsky (1977), trees can be used to represent not only the stress of individual words but their relationship with one another in phrases and among larger units of the poem.

Begin by assigning LEXICAL STRESS to the syllables of every word, using an "s" for strong syllables and a "w" for weak ones, as in

```
s   w
rabbit
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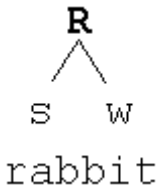
Every syllable, as labeled with an s or a w is called a "terminal node" because each syllable is an endpoint or non-branching terminus within the tree structure. The tree structure for "rabbit" looks as follows:

(3)



An "R" at the top of the tree indicates that the tree is rooted, meaning that it comprises a single constituent at its highest level. This notational system, using s's and w's with tree structures, applies throughout in binary pairings. Hence, there may be no w or s in isolation, and every s must be connected to a w and every w to an s. Likewise, all intermediate levels of branching must be connected in pairwise fashion until the single "root" (the topmost R) is reached, which signals that the linguistic material under analysis has been exhausted.

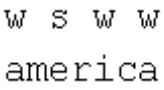
EXERCISE #1

Assign s's and w's and the appropriate tree structure to the following words: *arrive*, *crystal*, *freedom*, *exam*.

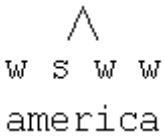
In order to build up the tree structure for words with more than two syllables, a higher level of tree structure is required. The tree structure is built up by working leftward from the end of the word, stopping at each s to connect it with a w on its right. I illustrate the steps to be taken with the word "america."

(4)

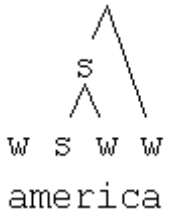
a. First assign w's and s's:



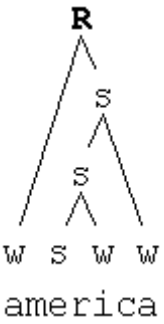
b. Working from the end of the word leftward, stop at the first s and construct a branched node connecting the s with the first w on its right:



c. The first branched node over "-meri-" is now connected by a higher branched node with the "-a-" on its right. Since "-a-" is weak (w), and "-meri-" contains an s at its first level, "-meri-" is assigned an s, showing its relative strength.



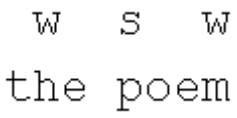
d. Finally, construct a still higher branched node to connect the leftmost stranded w with the s material on its right. Place an R at the top to show that the tree is rooted, that all the material under analysis has been exhausted.



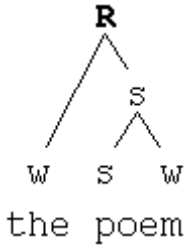
In stress trees the strongest stress in any word may be traced to the syllable dominated by s's all the way up the tree; in this case, that syllable is "-mer-."You may wonder why these rules for constructing branched nodes must apply in the way I have demonstrated above. Why does it matter how any w is connected to an s or vice versa? Tree structures, when properly applied, show both the relative and the hierarchical nature of stress. The degree of stress a syllable receives is determined by its stress context. It is "not absolute but exists by virtue of the greater or lesser stresses next to it" (Kiparsky, "The Rhythmic Structure of English Verse" 194). By mirroring the syntactic structure of a word, phrase or line, the tree structures also show the progressive levels or the hierarchy of stress. The rules we are using here to show the relative nature of stress in words will be applied again at larger and larger levels of the poem, allowing us to understand more readily the phrasal rhythms of much English poetry. To show you an example of how the rules for assigning s's and w's and their tree branches matter, it helps to consider a unit larger than a single word, for example, the phrase, "the poem." Here are the steps in its analysis.

(5)

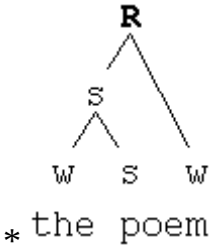
a. Assigning w's and s's, we have:



b. The question now is: How is the tree structure to be built up? Since an important rule of this notation is that branching must preserve the internal structure of every word in the phrase, the notation must be:



c. This structure-preserving constraint on branching rules out the alternative which would break the word boundary between "the" and "poem" (here and elsewhere mistaken examples are indicated with an asterisk):



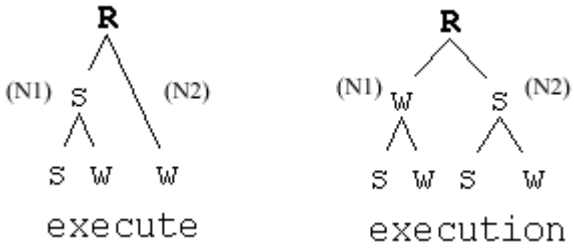
The incorrect scansion in example (5c) does not mirror syntactic structure as example (5b) does and it incorrectly represents the relative nature of stress by suggesting that there is a more major stress contrast between "po-" and "-em" than between "the" and "po-," which involves the setting-off effect of a word boundary. The connection between syntax and rhythm which the stress tree system of analysis highlights is of inestimable importance in determining how and where a poet exploits the tensions between these aspects of language as well as the impact of these tensions on the semantic level.

EXERCISE #2

Assign w's and s's and their appropriate tree structures to the following: *linguistics*, *gratitude*, *amazing*, *the pony*, *a flashlight*, *photograph*.

Obviously not all polysyllabic words have only one stress. Many have two or more. The WORD RULE explains how to build up the tree structures of words with more than one s; here again, the rule emphasizes the way stress is relative and hierarchical. Liberman states the Word Rule as follows: "In a pair of sister nodes N1 N2, N2 is s if and only if it branches" (Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm" 268). A node is a branch of a tree structure above the first level of w's and s's. Sister nodes are branches at the same level of analysis. Compare the branching and stress patterns in "execute" and "execution." In "execute," N2 does not branch so the stress falls on "ex." In "execution," both "ex" and "cu" are s at the first level of analysis. But here N2 does branch, making the strongest stress fall on "-cution," as indicated by the s at the second level of analysis.

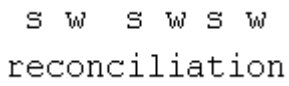
(6)



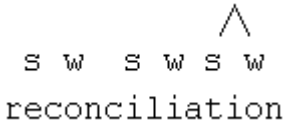
It may be useful to take another example that will demonstrate both the Word Rule and the steps for connecting the nodes of the tree in a more complex word. Take the word "reconciliation" (Liberman and Prince 268).

(7)

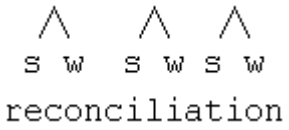
a. First assign s's and w's according to your everyday knowledge of pronunciation or with the help of the dictionary.



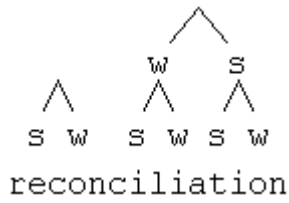
b. Working from the end of the word leftward, stop at the first s and construct a branched node connecting the s with the first w on its right.



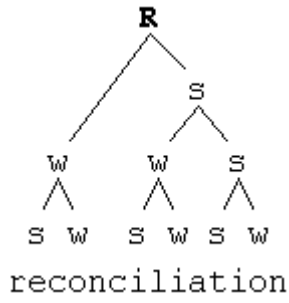
c. Repeat this process with each of the other s's.



d. Use the Word Rule to construct the relationship among the paired nodes. Again working from the end of the word, you see that "-ciliation" consists of two nodes, N1 and N2 and that N2 branches. Thus, the strongest s in this pairing will be on "-ation."

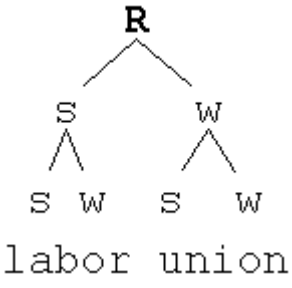


e. Now join "recon-" to the rest of the word. At the next level of tree structure, "-ciliation" is branching so it must again be assigned an s, while "recon-" is weak. Finally, root your tree at the top with an R to show that all the material under analysis has been accounted for.



COMPOUND WORDS are a peculiar type of polysyllabic words and they do not follow the Word Rule. The Word Rule applies only within words themselves and not across word boundaries. So while some compounds may appear to have the same branching structure we saw in "execution," for example in "labor union," the rule does not apply here. Instead, compounds have their strongest stress as far forward in the word as possible. So the proper tree structure for "labor union" looks as follows.

(8)



EXERCISE #3

Assign s's, w's and tree structures to the following words: *epidermal, honeysuckle, lawn-mower, falsification.*

3.2.4 - Stress in Phrases

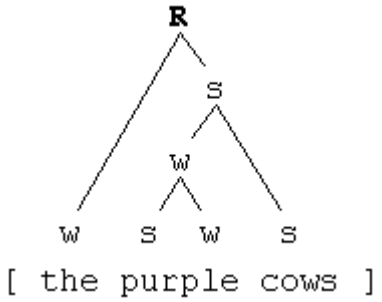
At the outset of this section on Prosody, we distinguished between content words and function words. So far, almost all of our attention has been on content words. Monosyllabic function words like "a," "the," "but" or "and" are generally unstressed, as we saw in "the poem" above. Polysyllabic function words have relatively stronger and weaker stresses within them, for instance in such prepositions as "before," "after," and "against." But at higher levels of analysis, i.e., in phrases and larger syntactic units, the stress in these words is almost always subsidiary to the content words to which they are attached.

As I indicated at the outset of the tutorial, understanding phrasal stress is critical for understanding the large-scale rhythms of poetry and the way these rhythms create our perception of time. Kiparsky goes so far as to claim that "The most important, virtually unbreakable constraints on meter in English involve the grammatical structure of the verse, notably the phrase and word units of which it is made up. . . . This syntactic phrasing appears to determine . . . the phonological phrasing of sentences, i.e., the locations of optional or obligatory intonation breaks, corresponding to CAESURAS in verse" ("Stress, Syntax, and Meter" 579, 581). Hence, one of the most important prosodic rules of the generative approach is the NUCLEAR STRESS RULE, which operates within PHONOLOGICAL PHRASES. "Nuclear" here has nothing to do with atomic energy; rather it has to do with an iterative process of determining stress relationally within ever larger syntactic structures, the nucleus being the syntactic center or head of a given phrase. The formal statement of the rule comes from Liberman: "In a configuration cABc, If c is a phrasal category, B is strong" (Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm 269, 257). *What this means is that in a phrase, the strongest stress of the phrase will fall as far back, i.e., as close to the end as possible.*

In this tutorial, we will deal primarily with three types of phrases, noun, verb and prepositional. You can identify them by looking at the syntax. For instance, in the sentence, "The purple cows went running on the dew-covered lawn, "The purple cows" is a noun phrase. "Went running on the dew-covered lawn" is a verb phrase, within which is the prepositional phrase, "on the dew-covered lawn," which in turn contains the noun phrase, "the dew-covered lawn." According to Kiparsky, there is an optional intonation break or pause between the noun and verb phrases, though one is not required to perform it. For our purposes, these optional breaks are important because they signal perceptual units of rhythm; in other words, they mark off the units that create our sense of time.

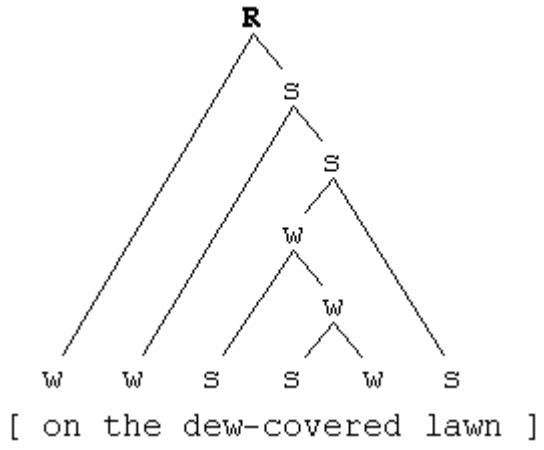
To take a practical example, let's first look at the smaller phrases in the sentence and then put them together. The convention for indicating phrases is brackets. In "the purple cows," the Nuclear Stress Rule tells us that the strongest stress falls on the head of the phrase, the noun, and both the article and the adjective are weak relative to "cows." "Purple" has a stressed syllable in it but relative to "cows," the word as a whole is weak.

(9)



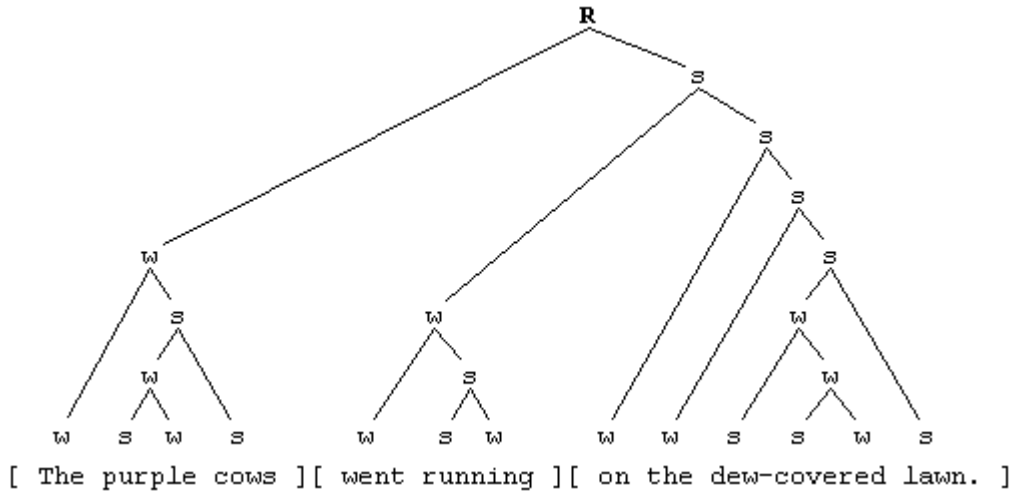
The prepositional phrase, "on the dew-covered lawn," has its strongest stress at the end on the noun, "lawn"; here again the adjective and function words will be relatively weak. Note here also that "dew-covered" is a compound word and is subject to the Compound Rule, not the Word Rule. "Covered" branches but for the Word Rule to apply, the branching must be word internal. Instead, the Compound Rule specifies that the strongest stress in the compound will be as far forward as possible, exactly opposite to the Nuclear Stress Rule for phrases.

(10)



To put the whole sentence together, we need to lodge the second prepositional phrase within the larger verb phrase and analyze the verb itself. Essentially the sentence divides into two large phrases; applying the Nuclear Stress Rule to the sentence as a whole allows us to see the opening noun phrase as subsidiary to the verb phrase.

(11)

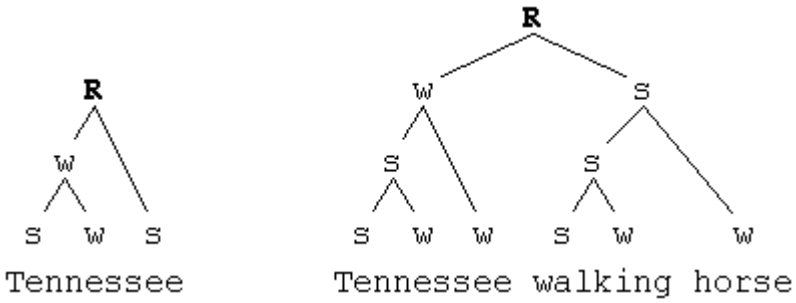


At a practical level, there are several techniques for analyzing lines or sentences that you can extrapolate from this example. It is easiest to begin your analysis by reading the line as a whole. Then look for polysyllabic words and assign s's and w's with their trees. Then consider phrases as in the "purple cow" example, allowing the Nuclear Stress Rule to guide you in assigning the relative stress of subsidiary content and function words as well as the relationship among phrases. You may find it helpful to mark the most prominent stress in a word or phrase so that you are clear about what the peak or most prominent point is.

Another important aspect of phrasal rhythms is the way the phrasal context can change the stress of words. In English, there is a strong preference for alternating stressed and unstressed syllables, a tendency captured by the binary system of analysis used here. We tend to avoid both too many unstressed syllables in a row and consecutively stressed syllables. We are more likely, for example, to say "a free and easy manner" rather than "an easy and free manner" or "bright and shining eyes" rather than "shining and bright eyes" (Attridge, REP 71). In both of the preferred forms of these phrases, stressed and unstressed syllables alternate. In the non-standard forms, the double unstressed syllables followed by double stressed syllables feels awkward to our mouths and ears.

The tendency towards alternating stressed and unstressed syllables is also apparent in the RHYTHM RULE which specifies that stress retraction occurs in certain words in order to produce this alternation. For instance, "Tennessee" normally has its strongest stress on the last syllable. But in the phrase, "Tennessee walking horse," the strongest stress in "Tennessee" retracts to the front of the word to produce an alternating pattern. Compare the following analyses:

(12)



Other examples of this pattern can be seen by comparing the differences between "thirteen" and "thirteen blackbirds" or "unknown" and "unknown soldier" (Attridge, PR 39).

EXERCISE #4

Apply appropriate s's, w's and tree structures to the following:
Black birds nibbled on the frost-covered corn.
Blackbirds sing sorrowful songs in the winter.
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

3.2.5 - Monosyllables and What to Do About Them, or, The Case of the Underlined W

In doing Exercise #4, if you treated "Black birds" as a noun phrase, with "birds" receiving the strongest stress, you would have no recourse but to make "black" weak. However, many if not most readers feel that "black" has significant stress, perhaps equal or nearly equal to that on "bird." Because the generative approach is syntactic in its orientation, a phrase composed of monosyllabic words will always obey the Nuclear Stress Rule, with the dominant stress on the noun, "bird." By contrast, in conventional scansion, such a phrase would commonly be treated as an example of a spondaic foot, i.e., two consecutively stressed syllables. Generative metrics outlaws the spondee because stress is always relative within a word or phrase and hence while "black" has stress, it is nonetheless subsidiary to "bird." I have developed a notation for handling such situations as these using an underlined w, i.e., <u>w</u>. I use this notation for consecutive monosyllabic words in a single phrase to indicate that the word has lexical stress but that it is syntactically weak compared to the word to which it is joined, usually the head of the phrase. (A w is the equivalent of a demotion in Attridge's system which we will come to later.) Thus, in the sentence, "Black birds nibbled on the frost-covered corn," I would scan the first phrase as follows:

(13)

<u>w</u> s
Black birds

Another example of this pattern can be found in line 3 of Shakespeare's Sonnet XVIII, "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May," where "Rough winds" can be scanned as w s.

4 - Versification

4.1 - What is meter?

In this section on versification, we will concentrate our energies on understanding only one of the many different conventional patterns that enable and constrain poetic composition, namely the meter traditionally referred to as iambic pentameter. The reasons for forsaking Anglo-Saxon alliterative meter, Hopkins' sprung rhythm, triple meters, falling duple meters, etc. here are both practical (time and space) and conceptual. Iambic pentameter has been, since the Renaissance, the meter of choice for most English-language poets. Our aim here is both to understand what it is and to suggest some of the reasons for its dominance, or some might say, hegemony. At a practical level, if you can understand iambic pentameter, you will find it relatively easy to analyze other types of metrical and even non-metrical poetry.

But before moving to the specifics of iambic pentameter, let's revisit briefly the whole idea of METER. What is meter? Cureton offers this definition: "Meter represents our rhythmic response to (relatively) regular pulsations in a perceptual medium, to moment-to-moment alternations of inactivity and activity, stasis and change--a response that seems to be deeply embedded in all biological organization. Technically, meter divides the text into a hierarchy of measures articulated by a hierarchy of metrical beats" (RPEV 123-124). There are several features of this definition worth drawing out. First, by talking about a "perceptual medium" rather than poetry specifically, the definition emphasizes the deeply physiological basis of rhythm. Meter is a part of animal as well as human life and present throughout a wide range of human experience, not just in literature and music. Second, the alternations of stasis and change have no set beginning or ending points. To quote a graphically apt metaphor coined by some music theorists, "meter is like wallpaper: it can begin and end anywhere" (Lerdahl and Jackendoff as quoted in RPEV 125). Thus, meter has no inherent teleology or sense of direction; it groups events or pulses in a local and objective manner without regard for their purpose or direction. There is nothing inherent in meter itself to make it begin or end. As we will see in the section on rhythmic phrasing (section 5), it is only through rhythmic grouping and prolongation that readers gain a sense of direction, anticipation and resolution. Finally, with specific reference to poetry, the definition indicates that meter segments a text into hierarchical patterns of beats that we can call measures.

4.2 - Two Roads Diverged in a Rhythmic Wood: A Note on Methods and a Plea for Choosing Both Roads

In the Prosody section of the tutorial you learned the basic rules of generative phonology for understanding rhythmic stress. In moving to meter, I will offer you two approaches, first the beat-offbeat method of Derek Attridge (section 4.3) and second, the generative approach, which develops directly from what you have earlier learned (section 4.5). There are significant conceptual differences between these approaches but learned together, they offer complementary insights. As Sally Gall has noted, Attridge's method is easily learned, makes intuitive sense, and it visually allows you to compare meter and rhythmic stress (Poetry in English 1161 ff.). Further, once you have learned Attridge's method, other forms of scansion, including generative, are easier to learn.

Simply put, the major differences between the two approaches are: 1) Attridge is concerned with the "perceptual experience" (REP 152), generative metrics with metrical competence. Following the tenets of generative linguistics more broadly, generative metrics aims not to describe lines of verse but to discover the ideal rules that operate within these lines such that a reader or poet can distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable, metrical and unmetrical lines. Attridge instead puts his emphasis on "what we actually experience when we speak or listen to speech" (REP 150), hence his metrical rules aim to describe "how certain arrangements of syllable and words give rise" to the perception of rhythmic and / or metrical regularity. This perception, or psychological set, is captured in a set of rules that do not consider the relative and hierarchical nature of stress but look instead at how stressed and unstressed syllables realize or occupy beats and offbeats in the metrical pattern.

Section 4. 5 will show you that generative metrics proceeds by comparing the stress trees you have learned to make with the abstract metrical pattern of a given verse instance. You will then be given rules for determining what makes a given line metrical or unmetrical as well as what makes a given line more or less complex. Attridge also presents his rules in terms of degrees and types of complexity. What the generative approach offers that Attridge does not is a focus on the syntactic basis of stress and consequently, on the phrasal nature of rhythm. Though one has to move even beyond generative metrics to understand the full consequences of phrasal rhythm, especially at higher levels of the poem (i.e., beyond the phonological phrase), generative metrics nonetheless provides a firm basis for beginning to understand the fundamentally phrasal character of rhythm (this will be the focus of section 5).

You may opt for learning either the Attridge or the generative method, i.e., work through either section 4.3 or 4.5. You should do section 4.4 on Elision, Caesura and Enjambment regardless of which approach you choose. But the best outcome, the fullest understanding of meter and rhythm, can be had by learning both and making use of the insights each has to offer. You may traverse either the more or less traveled

road, but unlike Frost, I would suggest that it makes all the difference to travel them both.

4.3 - Attridge's Beat-Offbeat Method

To use Attridge's method, you begin by marking the stress of the syllables above a given line. You need only mark s's and w's, without trees, since he does not emphasize the relative nature of stress (though the rules you have learned should help you in making these more simple designations). The next step is to mark the beats and offbeats of the metrical pattern below the line and then to compare the two patterns. Doing so will allow you to describe the style or set of the poem or poet based on the types of complexity and tension the poet uses.

4.3.1 - The Base Rules

The simplest metrical markings are B for beat and o for offbeat. The underlying rhythm of an iambic pentameter line is a pattern of five alternating offbeat / beat units, represented as follows: o B o B o B o B o B. With each rule I give you Attridge's formulation with his marking symbol and one of his examples followed by an exercise for you to practice. Here are Attridge's Base Rules:

Beat Rule: A stressed syllable may realize a beat.

B

Offbeat rule: One (or two) unstressed syllables may realize an offbeat.

o (one offbeat) ŏ (double offbeat)

Example (14 a) shows a line using the Base Rules only while Example (14b) shows the variant of the Offbeat rule using two unstressed syllables to realize an offbeat. This line is also an example of a common variant in iambic pentameter known as the INITIAL INVERSION, in which the first w s unit is reversed. It is this reversal that creates the double offbeat.

(14a)

```
 w   s     w   s  w      s  w     s    w    s
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed
 o   B     o   B  o      B  o     B    o    B
```

(14b)

```
 s   w    w    s    w   s   w    s     w   s
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease
 B     o      B    o   B   o    B     o   B
```

Exercise #5

Mark the stress and metrical beats and offbeats in the following:
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe,

Of course, if every line of English poetry followed only the Base Rules, it would be hideously boring. But there are numerous variations on these Base Rules that Attridge terms Deviation Rules. His Deviation Rules are rank ordered, with every subsequent deviation producing more complexity and combinations of deviations producing even greater complexity. The first deviation is the Promotion Rule.

4.3.2 - Promotion Rule

$\bar{B}$

"An unstressed syllable may realize a beat when it occurs between two unstressed syllables, or with a line-boundary on one side and an unstressed syllable on the other" (REP 359).

This rule reflects the tendency in English for a basically alternating rhythm, as we saw in the Rhythm Rule (e.g., Tennesee and Tennesee walking horse). Syllables are promoted when there would otherwise be three consecutively unstressed syllables in a row. That includes line beginnings and endings since the perceived continuity between lines extends the effective environment for unstressed syllables. Another way to think of this rule is to say that "an unstressed syllable may realize a beat when it is not adjacent to a stress in the same line" (REP 168).

(15)

```
 w   s  w  w   w   s    w   s  w    s
And often is his gold complexion dimmed
 o   B  o  B   o   B    o   B  o    B
```

Exercise #6

Mark the stress and the metrical beats and offbeats in the following:
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;

4.3.3 - Demotion Rule

ȯ

"A stressed syllable may realize an offbeat when it occurs between two stressed syllables, or after a line-boundary and before a stressed syllable" (REP 169).

This rule is the almost mirror opposite of the promotion rule. Here syllables are demoted to prevent too many consecutive stressed syllables. However, unlike the Promotion rule, which allowed promotion at line beginnings and endings, demotion can only occur at the beginning of a line (Example 16b) or internal to it (Example 16a).

(16a)

```
 w   s    w    s     w   s      s    s     w    s
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
 o   B    o    B     o   B      o    B     o    B
```

(16b)

```
  s    s     w   s    w   s   w   s   w   s
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
  o    B     o   B    o   B   o   B   o   B
```

You will notice that demotions most commonly occur in an environment of consecutively stressed monosyllabic words. Were you to draw a tree for 16 b, you would scan "rough winds," w s. Further, it's worth noticing that both promotion and demotion do not really change our pronunciation of these lines or alter our clear perception of the metrical set. Instead, they complicate our perception of the meter by giving the sense of slowing down or speeding up the lines. Promotion tends to give the line the feeling of a quicker pace while the consecutive stresses involved in demotion usually make the line seem slower because of the time it takes to pronounce and distinguish the individuated syllables. This sense of speed has clear interpretive implications as we become relatively more and less aware of certain words.

Exercise #7

Mark the stress and the metrical beats and offbeats in the following:
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,

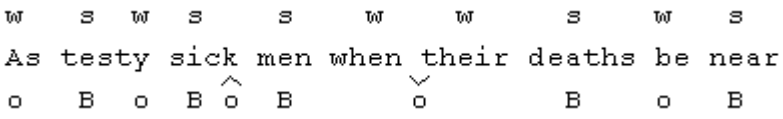
4.3.4 - Implied Offbeat Rule

ô

"An offbeat may be implied between two stressed syllables" (REP 174).

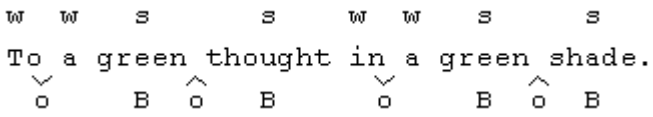
Attridge places this rule last among the deviation rules because it most disrupts metrical regularity. Since the perception of meter particularly depends on where the stressed syllables fall, a sequence of stressed syllables is especially disruptive of the metrical set. Hence, this rule specifies that if stressed syllables fall consecutively, they will be separated by an implied, rather than actual offbeat. In other words, there is no syllable that actually corresponds to an implied offbeat. It is rather a notional pause between the stressed syllables that reflects again the naturally alternating pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Because the occurrence of consecutive stresses is so disruptive, the implied offbeat is always accompanied by additional compensatory action within the line, namely a double offbeat (two offbeats in a row) immediately before or after the implied offbeat (but not at the very end of the line).

(17)



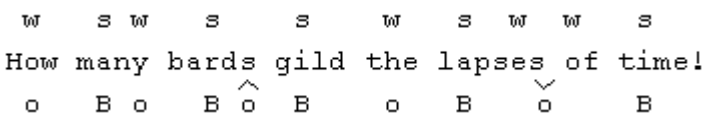
More than one set of implied + double offbeats may occur in some lines like this famous example from Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" (note that the line is in iambic tetrameter rather than pentameter). While this line has given many critics a great deal of trouble to explain, in Attridge's system, it is a straightforward, though doubled example of the implied offbeat and its conditions. You may want to think about how disruptive this line is to your perception of the meter; it will help to read the whole poem (see PIE 318-320, line 48).

(18)



Other poets--Donne is a prime example, vary the conditions of the implied offbeat and place the compensatory double offbeat at some distance from the implied offbeat. This variation pushes the reader's sense of regular metricality to the very edge and is one of the most disruptive variations you will see. Here is a much-discussed example of this pattern from Keats:

(19)



Exercise #8

Mark the s's, w's, beats and offbeats, including implied and double offbeats in the following:
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
Both the year's and the day's deep midnight is

4.3.5 - Complexity and Tension

As you have no doubt perceived from working with the examples and exercises, the further we have gone with Attridge's deviation rules, the more complicated the lines have become. Indeed, Attridge has ordered his rules according to increasing levels of complexity and one may use this ordering to characterize the differences between simple and complex metrical styles. He defines these styles as follows: "By a simple metrical style we mean one in which the selection of deviation rules produces a highly regular rhythmic alternation, and by a complex style one in which regular alternation is frequently challenged. And we have ordered our rules so that, by and large, the more often a later rule is used the more complex the metrical style. Thus we might say that Dryden's metre is relatively simple, since he strictly limits his use of the later deviation rules, while Milton's is complex, because he freely takes advantage of them. Similarly, an individual line can be classed roughly on a scale of complexity according to the deviation rules it makes use of" (REP 205).

Below is a full list of Attridge's order of complexity (REP 205-206). While I have not given you examples that combine promotion or demotion with implied and double offbeats, the exercises you have completed so far should prepare you to encounter such examples. In addition, you will notice that he does not list an implied offbeat with a delayed double offbeat such as you saw in Example 19 and Exercise #8. I would rank that variation at the very bottom of the list as producing a complexity even greater than two double offbeats and two implied offbeats.

1. Base rules only
2. Double offbeat option of second base rule
3. Promotion
4. Demotion (mid-line)
5. Demotion (initial)
6. Implied offbeat and double offbeat
7. Promotion, implied offbeat, and double offbeat
8. Demotion, double offbeat, and implied offbeat
9. Two double offbeats and two implied offbeats
10. Implied offbeat with distanced double offbeat (my addition)

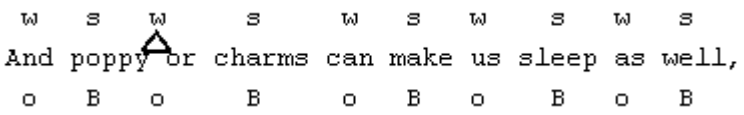
As you read and analyze more poems, you will begin to get a better feeling for how to treat the kinds of metrical complexity reflected in Attridge's list. Generally, it is not helpful to use it mathematically, counting up instances and making some kind of numerical judgement. Rather, it is a concrete descriptive tool that needs to be used in conjunction with literary critical good sense. More complexity doesn't necessarily make for a better poem but the kinds of complexity or simplicity a poet uses does

affect how we read. Thus, you need always to be aware of where particular deviations or patterns occur, how they are related to the sense of the poem, and how they affect our responses as readers (do we pay more or less attention to certain words, does the rhythm affect our sense of the speed of the line, its temporal embodiment, etc.?). A full account of these questions cannot be had by looking at metrical complexity alone for there are other kinds of tension in the poem, including most centrally, the relationship between the syntax and rhythm, both within the line and between lines.

4.4 - Elision, Caesura and Enjambment

Three other features you will need to know about for your analysis that often contribute to the tensions within the poem are elision, caesura and enjambment. Iambic pentameter lines should but do not always have ten syllables. There are so-called headless lines, a nine-syllable line with the initial w missing which you scan by simply putting the implied but missing w in parentheses. Sometimes lines have eleven syllables, the extra one most often occurring as an unstressed syllables at the end of the line or in the middle of the line with a syntactic pause. However, frequently the extra syllable in the line can be made to can be made to conform to metrical expectation through elision. ELISION makes two syllables into one. Naturally, elision cannot happen anywhere you feel like it but generally happens "where there is an unstressed vowel before a consonant or where one syllable ends with a vowel and the next begins with one (e. g., 'the oth-') (PIE 1166). When you read a line with an elision, you may be unaware of the way it complicates the line metrically since we almost automatically compensate for deviations to keep beats regular; but in so far as elision requires a hurrying to get in all the syllables, it contributes to the sense of a line's speed. As soon as you try to analyze the line, you will become very aware of the need to compensate for the irregularity. I mark elisions with a triangle over the two elided syllables to show that the two, signaled by the bottom two points of the triangle, equal a single syllabic position marked by the top point of the triangle. Here's an example from Donne:

(20)



In the Versification section of this tutorial, you learned that a PHONOLOGICAL PHRASE is defined as a syntactic phrase that produces an optional intonation break at its conclusion. While most of these breaks are not marked in performing a line, there are other kinds of breaks or pauses that are. Most iambic pentameter poems have the majority of their lines end with a syntactic pause, i.e., the syntax and the metrical pattern are parallel to one another. Such lines are referred to as END STOPPED because of the coincidence of syntax and rhythm; very often such lines will have punctuation to further signal the closure of the line. However, many poems include lines in which the syntax does not coincide with the line breaks, producing

caesuras and often, enjambments. A CAESURA is a pause, normally signaled by a strong syntactic break underscored by punctuation such as a comma, semi-colon, colon or a period that occurs somewhere other than the end of the line, most often in the middle, as in these lines from Milton's sonnet, "When I consider how my light is spent" (PIE 281). There are caesuras in lines 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

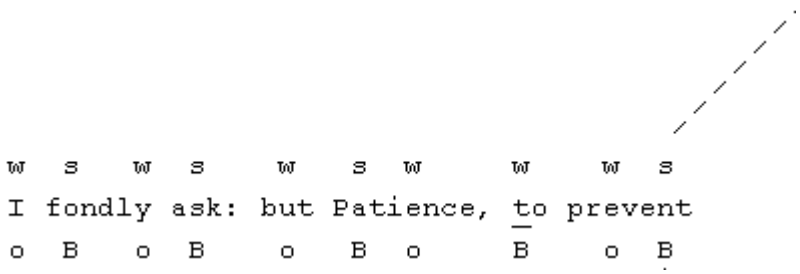
(21)

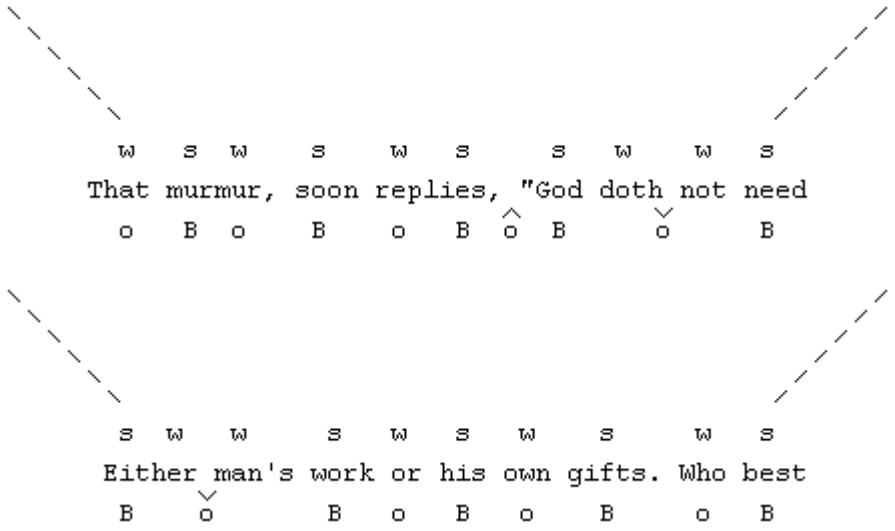
When I consider how my light is spent,
   Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
   And that one talent which is death to hide
   Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
   My true account, lest He returning chide;
   "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
   I fondly ask: but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
   Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
   Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best: his state
Is kingly: Thousands at his bidding speed,
   And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
   They also serve who only stand and wait."

Very often, the medial caesura is produced, as in these cases, by units of thought and syntax that exceed the prescribed pentameter length. In these lines Milton has masterfully draped his thought units over the shorter pentameter lines, producing an astonishing contrast between meter and syntax. He achieves this effect through ENJAMBMENT which occurs when the line end is not coincident with the syntax and the thought runs over into the next line. Note that enjambed lines usually do not have punctuation at the end (though lack of punctuation doesn't necessarily mean enjambment and the presence of punctuation doesn't preclude it. Syntax is what matters most.) The caesura or medial pause is often the launching platform for an enjambment, as you can see in all of the lines with a caesura.

The strong contrast between syntax and meter produced by enjambment can contribute significantly to the poem's tension. I mark enjambments by using a broken line, shaped like a generative tree, to signal the connection between the lines.

(22)





One of the most important effects of enjambment is to make the reader aware of the multiple domains of experience and thought to which the poem can simultaneously make us attend. That is, we are aware of the iambic pentameter metrical set and of the line as a unit. But we are also aware of the longer sense units. These simultaneous orders can have both global and local effects. We may consider both how a given phrase operates within a given line as well as its relationship to its larger syntactic grouping. Thus, enjambment makes us look both forwards and backwards in the poem, anticipating prospectively a line ending as well as retrospectively, hearing a just read phrase as initiating a thought whose incompleteness may only gradually become apparent. In the Milton example, these simultaneous orders are quite apparent in the lines,

That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best: his state

"God doth not need," read as an isolated phrase, is a theological truism that signals both God's omniscience and omnipresence. But it also stands as an ironic reminder of the plight Milton writes about: what need has God of any human, let alone one whose blindness thwarts his one true talent? This phrase does not exist in isolation; it is swept up by the headlong speed Milton creates through the enjambment in these and the following lines as he ticks off the contrast between those thousands who feverishly follow God's bidding and those who "also serve who only stand and wait." The poem's resolution, reached in the completely regular and unenjambed last line, brings metrical, syntactic and conceptual closure by re-harnessing these diverging domains, making them once again coincident. Milton's remarkable technique further suggests that in fact he has not stood idly by while others worked.

Exercise #9

Scan these lines from Shelley's "Ozymandias" (12-14; for the full text, see PIE 578) using the beat / offbeat method; in addition, mark the enjambments that occur and

then spend some time thinking about why Shelley uses them here. What effect do they have on your reading experience and understanding?

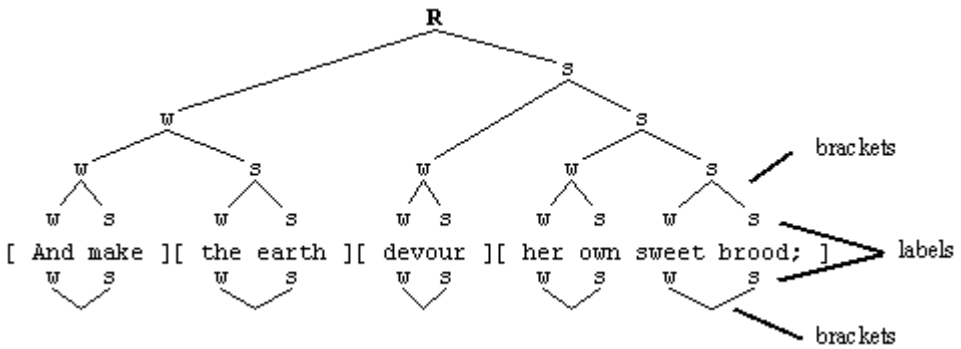
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

4.5 - Generative Metrics

Assuming that you have immersed yourself in Attridge's beat-offbeat method, it may seem like changing horses in midstream to return now to generative metrics. Fortunately, having worked through the assignment of trees in the Versification section, it is short work now to learn how to compare the stress pattern to the metrical pattern and to see how the generative approach deals with complexity and tension. Also, section 4.4 on Elision, Caesura and Enjambment, is equally applicable to both methods and in fact, the syntactic emphasis of the generative approach should make some aspects of enjambment clearer. After showing you how to use the generative approach, I will also offer a brief comparison of the two methods.

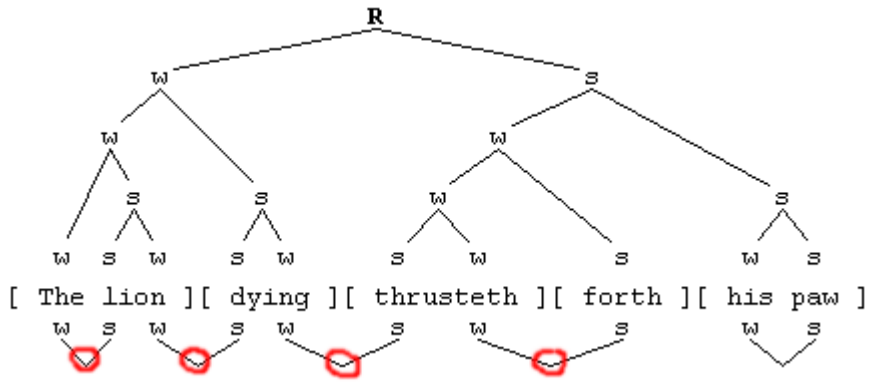
Having marked syntactic phrases with square brackets and indicated the stress and stress trees for all the words and phrases in a line of verse, you are ready to compare the stress patterns with the abstract metrical pattern. Instead of Attridge's o B o B o B o B o B pattern to represent iambic pentameter, generative metrics uses a set of five w s units, each grouped together by a bracket (in conventional analysis, each of these units would be called a foot). The foot units of the abstract metrical norm are notated below the line. By comparing the two patterns, tension-producing bracketing and labeling mismatches can be clearly perceived. "Labels" refers to the w and s patterns above and below the line. "Brackets" refers to the lines connecting the metrical pattern below the line and the stress pattern of the syllables and words above the line. A completely regular line will match the s's of the stress pattern to the s's of the metrical pattern (likewise w's to w's) as well as matching the brackets of the verse instance with the abstract pattern, as in Example 23.

(23)



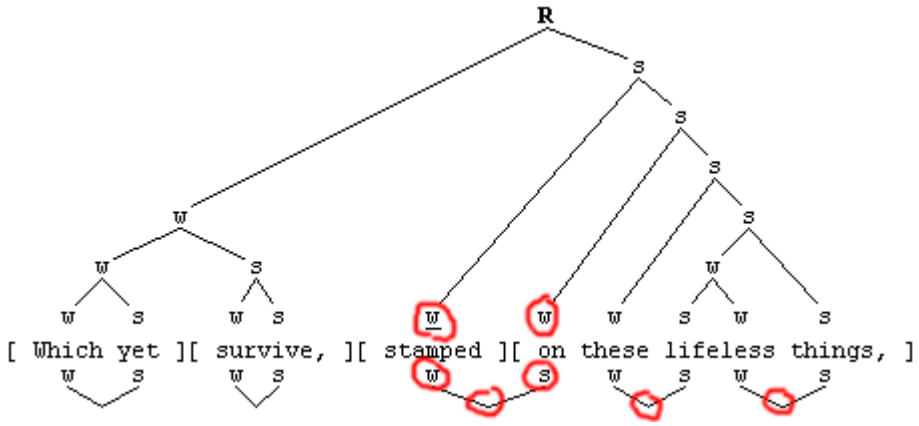
As you know from your work with the Attridge system, few lines are as regular as this one. Generative metrics measures complexity, i.e., deviations from this normative pattern, in terms of bracketing and labeling mismatches. In general, the greater the number of mismatches, the more complex a line tends to be. A BRACKETING MISMATCH occurs when the bracketing of the particular verse instance violates, at the first level of tree structure, the boundaries of the iambic feet shown below the line. I circle each metrical foot below the line to show where a violation occurs, as in Example 24, which has four bracketing mismatches.

(24)



A LABELING MISMATCH is produced when an s in the stress pattern occurs in a w position of the metrical pattern or a w in the stress pattern occurs in an s position of the abstract metrical norm. As you might suppose, an s occupying a w metrical position is far more disruptive than a w in an s position. If you think back to Attridge's complexity rules, you will see that such features as demotion and the implied offbeat both involve a stressed syllable in a weak metrical position. Thus, though Attridge and the generative approach start from different assumptions, both systems of analysis give this type of complexity a similar place in their analyses. As you will see in a moment, the generative approach also reflects aspects of complexity that the Attridge system overlooks. But staying for the moment with their points of similarity, take this line from Shelley's "Ozymandias" which you analyzed in Exercise #8. Attridge sees the source of the deviations in this line as the implied offbeat / double offbeat combination; in generative terms the complexity is produced by the labeling and bracketing mismatches. You may want to compare your analysis here with your analysis in Exercise #8.

(25)



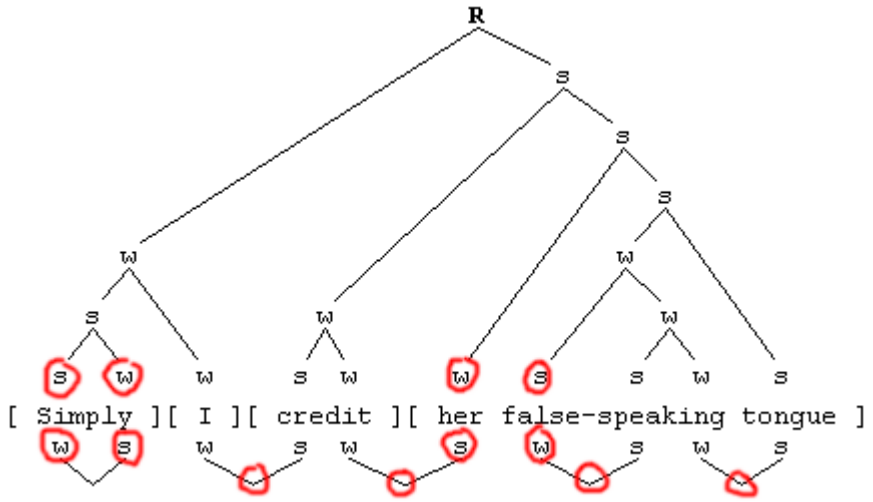
Determining the number and kinds of mismatches in a given line allows one to measure a line's complexity and often its greatest points of interest in terms of the poem's meaning. Before looking at some more complicated examples, try practicing some lines with straightforward bracketing and labeling mismatches. The greater the number of mismatches, the more complex the line is considered to be.

Exercise #10

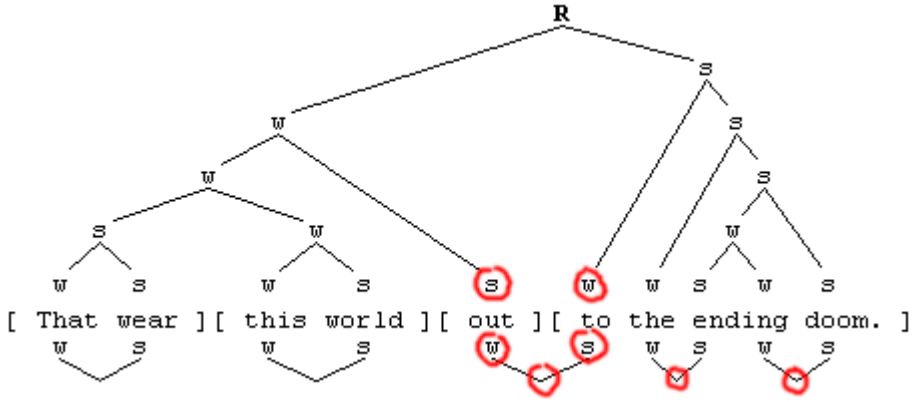
Scan these lines using the generative approach, including brackets for the syntax and complete tree structures.
Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe,
They also serve who only stand and wait.

Some mismatches, like the reversed initial foot (as in Exercise #10a), are harmless and occur frequently with little disruption of the pentametric norm. However, it is possible to take mismatches to the point of unmetricality. "Unmetricality" is the rhythmic equivalent of an ungrammatical expression; in the context of poetry, think of it not so much as an expression that shouldn't occur but as one that marks the limits of metrical constraint. A line is UNMETRICAL when an s in the verse instance occurs in a metrical w position simultaneously with a bracketing mismatch. Notice that this rule does not preclude a w occurring in a metrical s position with a simultaneous bracketing mismatch. This rule about unmetricality is useful not so much because it tells us about something that shouldn't happen; rather, when an unmetrical line occurs, it is almost always marks a highly significant semantic point in the poem. Consider these two examples:

(26a)



(26b)



In the first example, the unmetricality comes from the compound, "false-speaking," which forces the consecutive stressed syllables and whose bracketing simultaneously cuts against the metrical pattern. Not accidentally, this unmetrical instance occurs in a sonnet about the truth and falsity of love and lovers and gives our ears a stinging dissonance on the lover's "false-speaking tongue." The second example comes from a sonnet where Shakespeare extols the virtues of his lover who, by virtue of his poetry, can outlive the onslaughts of time as well as the judgments of men. "Your praise," he tells his love, "shall still find room / Even in the eyes of all posterity / That wear this world out to the ending doom." The unmetricality occurs here at the point of collision between the asserted eternality of love and poetry and the certain transience of the world, of life and language itself.

The following exercise gives you practice with some unmetrical lines. Beyond figuring out why they are unmetrical in a narrowly analytical sense, you may want to read them in the context of the poems, thinking about what effect these lines have within the poems.

Exercise #11

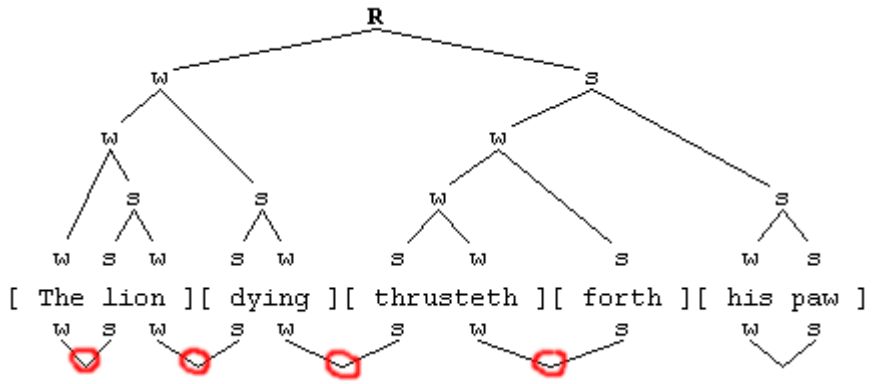
Scan these lines using the generative approach, including brackets for the syntax and complete tree structures.

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
That mine own writings, like bad servants, show

4.6 - Some Thoughts on the Relative Merits of Attridge and Generative Metrics

I suggested in section 4.2 that learning both the Attridge and the generative approaches would give a fuller understanding of rhythm. While the beat-offbeat system is probably easier to learn and has a simplicity and clarity in its application, the generative approach nonetheless allows for certain kinds of observations and understanding of poetry that the beat-offbeat system alone may not give. The chief differences result from the emphasis the generative approach gives to syntax and to word-level stress. To demonstrate, let me go back to the line you analyzed in Example 24, here presented using both methods.

(27a)



(27b)

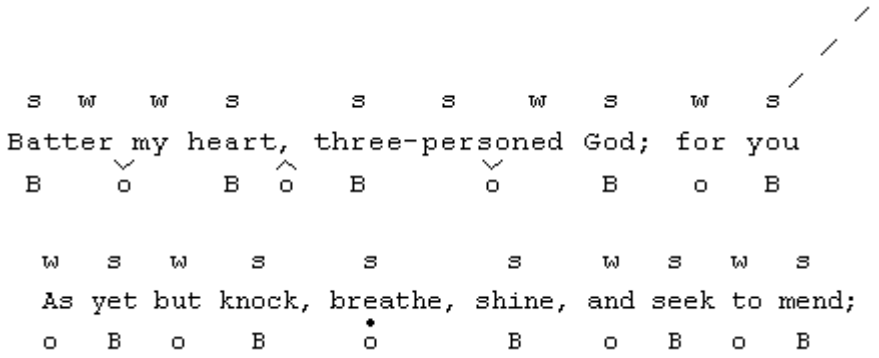
```
w   s  w s  w    s     w      s     w    s
The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw
 o  B  o B  o    B     o      B     o    B
```

In the Attridge analysis (27 b), this line is a perfectly regular iambic pentameter line with no complexity whatsoever. But say the line outloud to yourself and you will realize that we inevitably focus on the lexical, i.e., word stress in the line. Our first and predominant aural experience is of the words, "lion," "dying," and "thrusteth," all words with a trochaic (s w) or falling rhythm that is at odds with the rising iambic meter. The generative analysis (27 a) reflects this experience in the four bracketing mismatches. Because generative analysis focuses on syntax and insists on the integrity of word boundaries, it is more sensitive not only to the relationship between syntax and rhythm but, through that relationship, to those points in the poem that often are most semantically crucial.

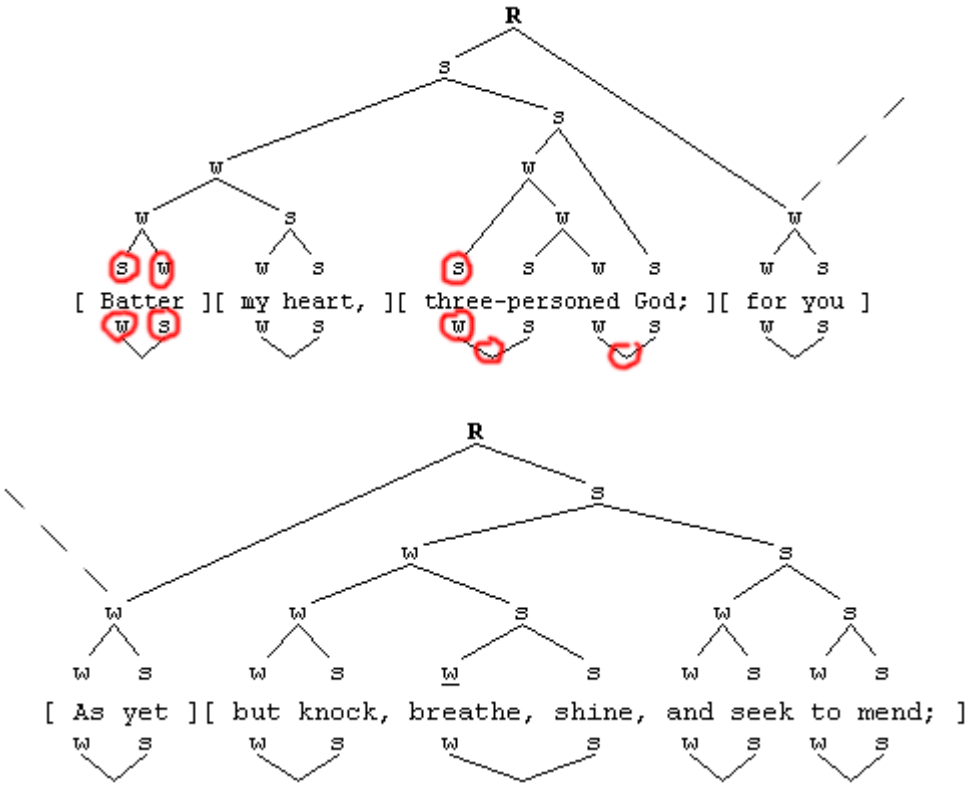
The generative emphasis on syntax also makes us more aware of the relationship between the line as a metrical unit and the syntax, which often does not follow the strictures of line length, as we saw in the enjambment examples and exercises in

section 4.4. While Attridge certainly recognizes enjambment, his method does not provide a way to understand how language is grouped in units other than those defined by the line. As you will see in section 5, on rhythmic phrasing, poets work not only with phonological phrases, with which you are already familiar, but also with larger phrasal units. Insofar as the generative approach makes you aware of types of prominence within phrasal groupings, it prepares you to recognize various kinds of phrasal units of the poem, including those at the highest formal levels (e.g., intonation units, stanzas, whole poems) as well as the relationships of subordination and hierarchy that characterize them. Take for instance the Donne line you analyzed in Exercise #11 along with its subsequent line. These together open his Sonnet XIV and they provide a tour de force of Donne's metrical and rhetorical prowess. Here again are both the Attridge and generative analyses.

(28a)



(28b)



Unlike Example 27, where the two types of analysis produced very different results, the two approaches to the Donne lines similarly identify the places of complexity. In the first line, the beat-offbeat method shows an implied offbeat and two sets of double offbeats, the second with a demotion, which places the line well up on the complexity scale. The second line has only a single instance of demotion. By generative lights the first line is unmetrical because of the simultaneous presence of an s in metrical w position ("three") and a bracketing mismatch. The second line has an underlined w, in effect the equivalent of the demotion in the beat-offbeat schema.

So if the approaches have this many similarities, what are the significant differences? The tree structures, by mapping the relative and hierarchical nature of stress, allow us to see graphically that these opening lines are composed of two units balanced against each other, "Batter my heart, three-personed God" and "for you / As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend." The strong pause after "God" clearly sets up the enjambment that begins with the new phrase, "for you." Looking at the highest level of tree structure, we see that the main clause is strong while, "for you" is weak. "For you" receives its syntactic completion only in line two. But notice what the line break does. Line two is a series of powerful actions performed by God on the speaker of the poem. But God, the active agent, is confined in the weak position at the end of line one where he is subsidiary both to the commandment given by the speaker to God ("Batter my heart . . . ") and to the strong verbs of line two which the speaker implies are not sufficient to move him, i.e., as yet knocking, breathing and shining are insufficient. While it's true that God is also named directly in the first part of line one, indeed is the syntactically climactic point, it is of course just here that the line becomes unmetrical, suggesting a pre-eminence which is, if not questioned, then rendered less than harmonious. The opening dissonance and rhythmic chaos, packed so forcefully into those first eight syllables, is relaxed after the semi-colon into an extended but nearly regular twelve-syllable unit, despite the remarkable string of monosyllabic verbs.

While nothing about Attridge's method would preclude you from considering syntax and enjambment, there is also nothing to encourage you to do so. The generative approach foregrounds the role of syntax, especially phrasal units; further, by focusing on the relative and hierarchical nature of stress, at both the word and phrase level, we are prepared to see both the larger and smaller structures of the poem in these relational terms. The Donne poem, whose opening lines we have briefly considered, also turns thematically on issues of hierarchy and subordination. You may not wish to see every formal feature as having a thematic parallel; indeed, I would argue that while rhythm can have the function of semantic reinforcement, as it does here, the most powerful function of rhythm is formal and has no strict thematic analogue. How we perceive and understand larger scale phrasal rhythm is the subject of the last section of the tutorial.

5 - Understanding Phrasal Rhythm: A Beginning

With the complexities you have just encountered in Donne, Sidney, Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley fully in your ears, I'd like to ask you to aurally recall as well as think back to the first examples you read for this tutorial, "Humpty Dumpty" and "A man whose name was Johnny Sands." The differences between these two groups of poems can, at one level, be ascribed to the differences between high culture and popular culture. That true but easy explanation would not, however, explain why poets in English since the Renaissance have tended predominantly to choose the iambic pentameter rather than the four stress meter or, for that matter, any of a number of other metrical forms. Historically, the reasons for this choice have not received very adequate explanation. Attempts to explain this preference have been hindered by the prevailing assumption that rhythm and meter are equivalent and that verse form is defined by the choice of meter. As you have seen from both the Attridge and generative approaches, rhythm is generally regarded as a deviation from a normative metrical pattern with complexity determined by the number and type of variations. In this conception of verse form, meter is what defines rhythm; rhythm is seen "as either a reinforcing or loosening of meter / beating" (DM 7). But if you think back to the last several exercises and examples, you will see that what we primarily focused on, indeed, what drives this poetry and makes it compelling, is the sense of the speaking voice. That voice is not produced by a rigid adherence to metrical beating but by the creation, though phrasal rhythm, of a distinctively shaped speech that rises out of, above and often in stark contrast to metrical beating.

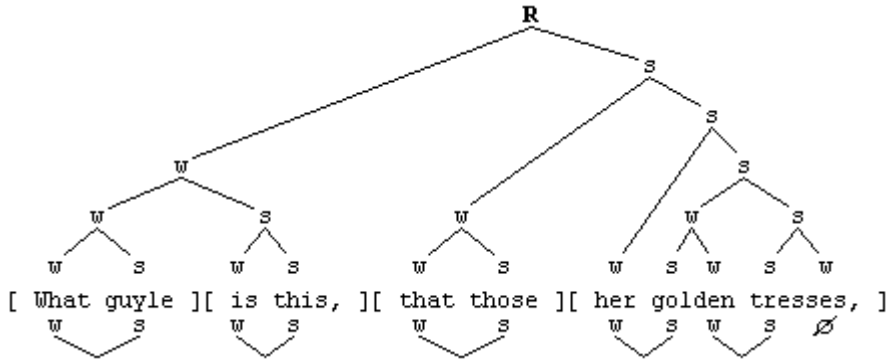
One way to account for the rise of a personal voice in Renaissance poetry, a development simultaneously of voice, the pentameter and the sonnet form itself, is as the emergence and "establishment of a dominant phrasal order" (DM 7). In this understanding, rhythm is not regarded as a loosening of metrical constraint but an independent, even oppositional force, that has its own distinctive modes of organization. Richard Cureton argues that this emphasis on phrasing rather than meter helps to explain not only local, small-scale questions of rhythm but also large-scale issues of form and argumentation. In the discussion of RHYTHM in section 2, I quoted Cureton's distinction between meter and rhythm: meter is "physical, continuous, repetitive, rigid, local, and retrospective;" phrasing is "emotive, divisive, shaped, flexible, and centering / climactic" (DM 6). This distinction will, I hope, make better experiential sense to you now than it could then.

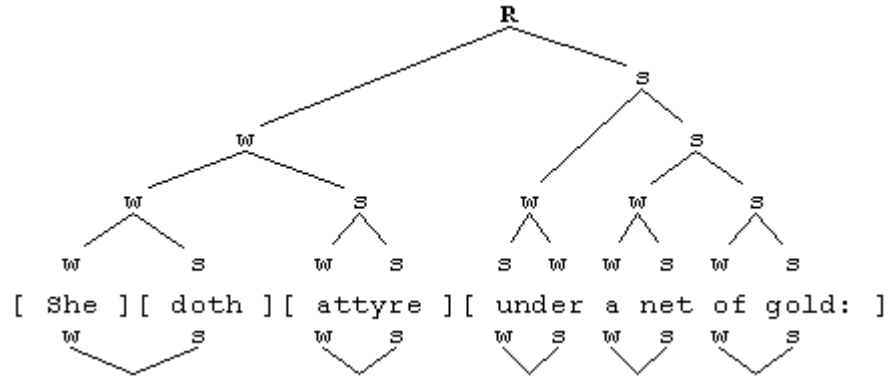
In other words, meter projects inflexible beating patterns, usually signaled at the outset of a poem or line by a strong beat that is then continued throughout. By contrast, phrases move in proportioned units whose shapeliness is perceived as they come to completion or climax, i.e., to cadence, usually at a line end. In contrast to meter which, like wallpaper, can go on and on in its pattern forever, phrasal rhythms are defined by their patterned contours, centered around peaks of tension and release, climax and relaxation. A four stress meter allows rhythm patterns that deviate wildly from the beat, e.g., nursery rhymes often have variable numbers of syllables between beats; or think of the relation in rap between the beat and the rhythm. Nonetheless the four stress or ballad meter are such strong meters that phrasing is repeatedly constrained by the quick return to initial beating. The pentameter, while lengthening the line by only two syllables, i. e., one beat, is a much weaker meter. The returning

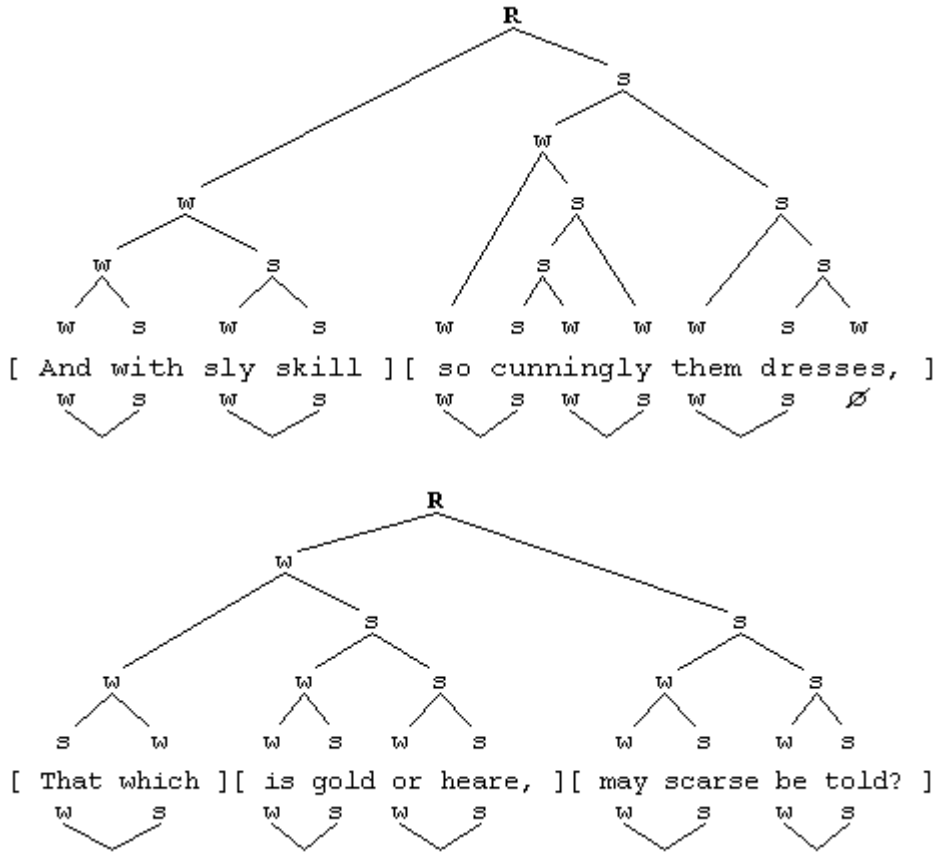
initial downbeat occurs less often and the strength of the meter tends to wane as a line progresses. Thus it became a natural choice for Renaissance poets who wanted to foreground the phrasal contours of the speaking voice.

But even among English Renaissance poets, there is a dramatic development of the phrasal possibilities of iambic pentameter. When Shakespeare began to write his sonnets around 1590 (they were published in 1609), the tradition of iambic pentameter developed by such poets as Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Spenser had relatively set features: 1) a ten-syllable iambic line; 2) a conventional mid-line break, usually dividing the line into a group of four syllables and a group of six syllables; 3) a predominance of end-stopped lines; and 4) a fairly regular congruence between the metrical pattern and the verse instance , i.e., a minimal number of labeling and bracketing mismatches or degrees of complexity (Wright 43; see his Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of these developments). Consider the opening quatrain of Sonnet 37 in Spenser's sonnet sequence, Amoretti (I have given both Attridge and the generative analysis for illustrative purposes; you need not do both).

(29)



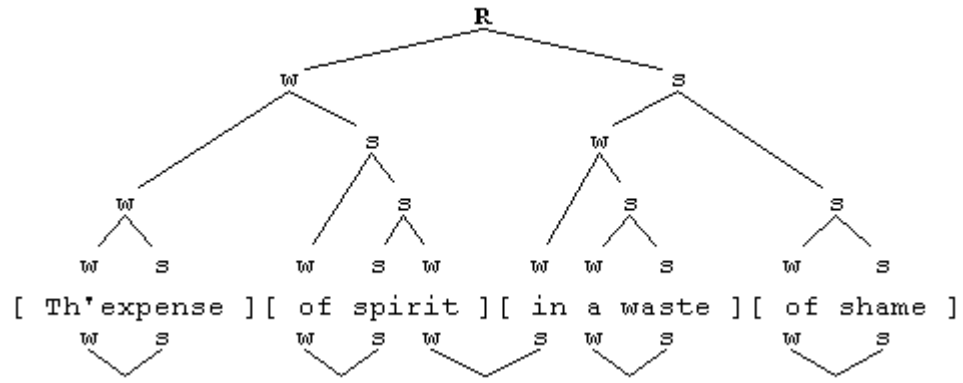


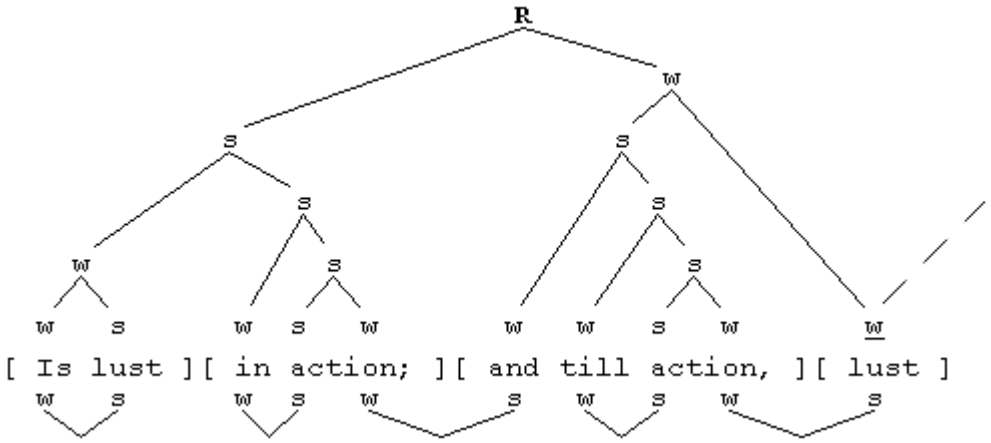


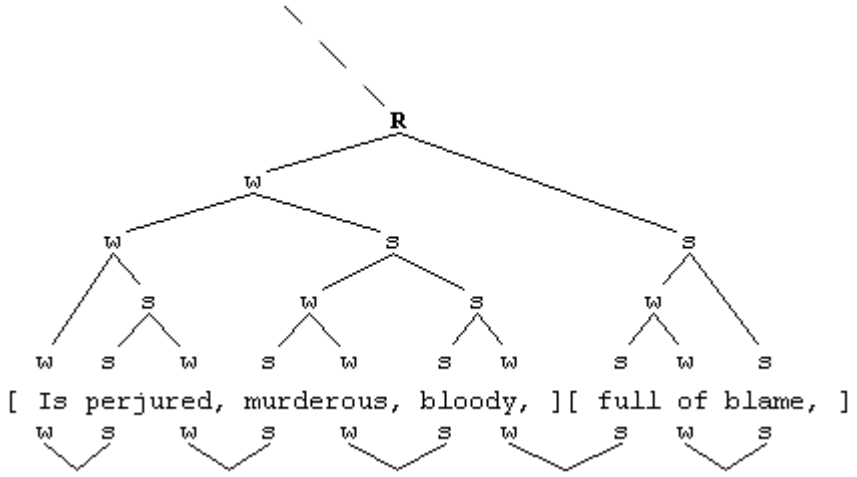
Each of these lines works fundamentally with a ten-syllable iambic line. The first and fourth lines are explicitly divided into groupings of four and six (or seven) syllables through the off-setting commas, while the middle lines are similarly divided through syntactic definition (And doth attire [verb phrase] /under a net of gold [prepositional phrase]://And with sly skill [prepositional phrase] so cunningly them dresses [verb phrase]). Each of the lines is end-stopped, both rhythmically and orthographically. Finally, the rhythmic phrases follow the metrical pattern quite closely; there is little of the expressive variation we saw, for instance, in Donne.

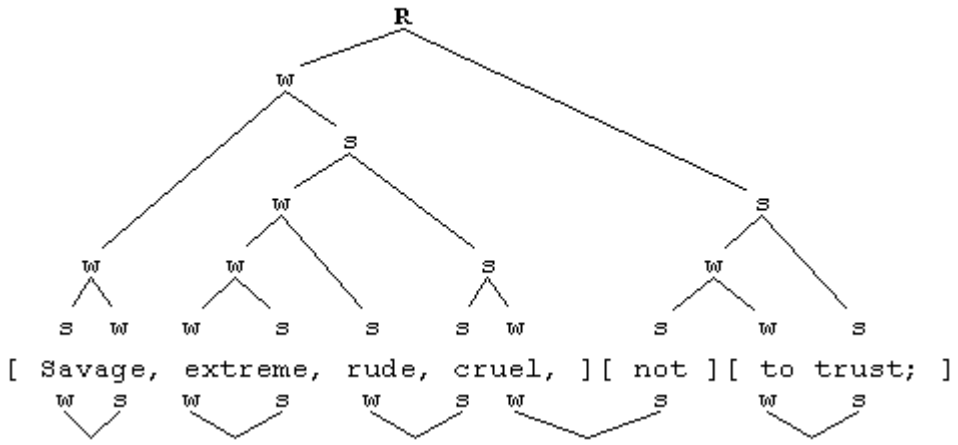
While Shakespeare wrote some sonnets that conform to the expected form as closely as Spenser does in Sonnet 37, he is generally credited with expanding the potential of the phrasal order, making his language more speech-like in the process. Wright articulates four sources of increased flexibility in the iambic pentameter: 1) trochaic phrasal rhythm; 2) increasing freedom in the treatment of the mid-line break; 3) a greater and more radical use of enjambment; and 4) the use of so-called feminine endings (an extra, i.e., eleventh unstressed syllable at the line end) (Wright 55-56). The third line of the Spenser sonnet provides an example of a feminine ending but it is, as the example shows, not very disruptive of metrical order and perhaps the weakest contributor to the development of an independent phrasal order. The beginning of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 provides a good example of the other three of these features.

(30)


R
[Th'expense][of spirit][in a waste][of shame]


R
[Is lust][in action;][and till action,][lust]


R
[Is perjured, murderous, bloody,][full of blame,]



Trochaic rhythms dominate line three and part of line four, as reflected by the bracketing mismatches and, in the case of "Savage," by a labeling mismatch. While these mismatches are an acceptable deviation from the iambic norm, they also signal a motion fully contrary to what the meter leads one to expect, lending the lines a sense of being simultaneously rooted in but independent from the meter. As one speaks them aloud, one's ear is definitely tuned to the almost relentless falling rhythms of the adjectives, including cruel, which is here pronounced as a di-syllable (Booth 443-444). In addition, the last line, at least in the generative system, would be considered unmetrical because of the simultaneous bracketing and labeling mismatch on "rude." The rude internal divisions of the speaker are enacted at another level in the theatricalized contest between meter and rhythm.

Changes in the treatment of the mid-line break and the increased use of enjambment are inter-related phenomena. As we saw in examples 22 and 28, the later in the line that a pause occurs, especially one marked by punctuation, the more likely that enjambment will occur. In addition, by eschewing the four syllables plus six syllables configuration, poets increase the variety and shape of their phrases. In line two, for example, Shakespeare begins with a five-syllable phrase, "Is lust in action," followed by a strong stop on the semi-colon. He continues with a four-syllable phrase, "and till action," ending with at least a minimal pause at the comma following "action." "Lust," the thematic heart of the poem, is thus stranded alone on the line end, precipitating the enjambment completed in the long verb phrase strung out over lines three and four.

The effects of Shakespeare's phrasal shaping of these lines are several and they have significant interpretive consequences. The strong medial break in line two divides the line into two uneven phrases, making the phrase rather than the evenly measured iambic metrical unit, the unit of perception. The isolation of "lust" at the line end highlights its rhythmic as well as thematic ambiguity and complexity. On the one hand, "lust" is the climax of the line since it occupies a metrically strong position and it completes syntactically the chiastic structure of the line. "A CHIASMUS is a sequence of two phrases or clauses which are parallel in syntax, but with a reversal in the order of the corresponding words" (Abrams 162). On the other hand, the pause before "lust" and the carry over of the syntax into the next two lines weakens the

closure on "lust," making the line temporally forward looking. The chiasmus works both a syntactic and a temporal reversal, suggesting a contrary motion within the language itself.

The quatrain as a whole can be broken into two larger phrasal groups, divided by the semi-colon in line two. The coherence of lines three and four as a distinct sub-grouping is underscored by their syntactic parallelism, the largely parallel falling rhythms in the string of adjectives, and the syntactic and rhythmic equivalence of the final and judgmental three-syllable groupings, "full of blame" and "not to trust." Finally, the first quatrain is not as self-enclosed as our usual descriptions of the sonnet form would make us think. The fourth line ends not with a period but a semi-colon, signaling both a continuing syntactic structure and a continuing readjustment on the reader's part of relations of prominence and hierarchy on the temporal and moral planes. While meter leads us to expect closure at each line end, Shakespeare's phrasal rhythms continually delay our sense of completion and climax, requiring a constant re-assessment of the dimensions of the speaking voice that is temporally unfolded in the poem.

The sense conveyed by the phrasal structures of the opening quatrain is one of the speaker turning back upon himself in conflict and uncertainty, pulled first one direction and then another, desiring and then ruing the desire that brings him so low, despising even the shame that is wasted in contemplation of his dissolute state. The regularities of a rhythm completely fitted to meter could not begin to structure the drama of such feeling, thought and expression. The phrasal patterns that Shakespeare uses trace the rise and fall of a mind seeking both to express and understand itself in a context where the affections may be wed to conflicting ends and where speech itself becomes the locus for hearing and sorting out the cadences of contemplation in action.

As you leave this tutorial for reading and enjoying more poems, you may want to think about the broader implications of what you have learned about rhythm, considering such issues as how rhythm organizes our perception of time, both local and global, how forms give shape to time, including our senses of expectation, duration and completion, how forms of argument and figurative language work sometimes in concert and sometimes at odds with other temporal structures such as line, stanza, verse paragraph or rhyme schemes, and finally, how the awareness of multiple temporal structures within a poem creates new and rich expectations of you as a reader.

To help you test out your understanding of the analytical tools you have learned and to think further about phrasal rhythm, I leave you with one last exercise, this time an entire poem.

Exercise #12

Using either the Attridge or generative methods, scan all of Shakespeare's Sonnet 64 (#12a will give the Attridge scansion; #12b will give the generative scansion). When you have completed your scansion, consider these questions: 1) What kinds of

rhythmic complexity does Shakespeare use, where does it occur and what are the local effects of these complexities? 2) What's the connection between rhythmic complexity and meaning? 2) Where does he use enjambment and what are its effects? 3) At what points in the poem do you become aware of the phrasal rhythms working at odds with or almost independently of the meter? 4) How do the rhetorical or syntactical structures of the poem work in relation to these phrasal rhythms? Think about parallelism and chiasmus as a start to this process.

Glossary

Ballad

Ballads are the narrative form of a folk song that tells a story. The ballad stanza consists of a quatrain of alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter lines, usually with rhyme of the second and fourth lines.

Bracketing Mismatch

A bracketing mismatch occurs when the bracketing of the particular verse instance violates, at the first level of tree structure, the boundaries of the metrical foot pattern shown below the line.

Caesura

A caesura is a pause, normally signaled by a strong syntactic break, e. g., a phrase break, often underscored by punctuation such as a comma, semi-colon or a period. It usually occurs somewhere other than the end of the line, usually the middle.

Chiasmus

"is a sequence of two phrases or clauses which are parallel in syntax, but with a reversal in the order of the corresponding words" (Abrams 162).

Common Meter

Common meter is used for many hymns, ballads and nursery rhymes and consists of alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter lines.

Compound Words

Compound words are polysyllabic words made up of two individual words joined together. In analyzing their stress patterns, the individual word boundaries are

maintained; the strongest stress will appear as far forward in the compound word as possible, e.g., "labor union" has its strongest stress on "la-."

Elision

Elision makes two syllables occupy a single metrical position. Normally elision happens "where there is an unstressed vowel before a consonant or where one syllable ends with a vowel and the next begins with one ('the other')" (Poetry in English 1166). See Example 20.

End Stopped

A line is end stopped when the syntax and rhythm coincide at its conclusion. Very often such lines will also have punctuation to further signal the closure of the line. These lines contrast with an enjambed or run-on line.

Enjambment

A line is enjambed when the line end is not coincident with the syntax and the thought runs over into the next line. Many enjambed lines do not have punctuation at the end, though punctuation does not alone determine whether a line is enjambed. A medial caesura often precedes enjambment as in Example 22.

Generative Linguistics

Generative linguistics, begun by Noam Chomsky, is an attempt to create a grammar that defines "the set of grammatical sentences in a language" (David Crystal, A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) 135)). By constructing the set of rules that underly any actual performance of speech, the linguist is able to account for those utterances which could and could not be uttered, i.e., are grammatical or ungrammatical. Similarly, the generative metrist attempts to write the rules which specify what sequences of poetic language are metrical or unmetrical. For an overview of generative metrics, see Attridge, REP 34-55 or, for a much more detailed treatment, see the articles by Kiparsky or Liberman.

Initial Inversion

In iambic pentameter, initial inversion refers to a reversal of the first two syllables so that the line begins, s w, rather than w s. This deviation is very common and usually does not create a high degree of complexity in a line since the iambic pattern is almost always immediately re-established. See Attridge, REP 188 ff for further discussion.

Isochronous

Isochrony refers to the idea that English has a strong tendency towards being a stress-timed language, i.e., that beats fall at roughly equal intervals and that we speed up or slow down the syllables between beats to make the beats equally spaced. There has been debate whether this isochrony is objective or a matter of perception but certainly the perception of English as isochronous is undeniable.

Labeling Mismatch

A labeling mismatch occurs when an s in the stress pattern of a line occurs in a w position of the metrical pattern or a w in the stress pattern occurs in an s position of the abstract metrical norm.

Lexical Stress

Lexical stress refers to the stress in a polysyllabic word. The term is used to specify that in assigning stress in a sequence of syllables, word boundaries must always be maintained. For instance, see Example 5.

Meter

Meter is the organization of beats into regular patterns (Attridge, BM 11). Conventionally, meters have been named after the regularly recurring pattern units or feet, as they are usually called. The meter is further named after the number of these feet per line. So the iambic pentameter consists of five feet of the pattern, w s (an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable). The most common feet are:

- iambic (w s)
- trochaic (s w)
- pyrrhic (w w)
- spondaic (s s)
- anapestic (w w s)
- dactyllic (s w w)

The types of line lengths are numerically named: monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter or alexandrine, heptameter, octometer (Attridge, REP 6).

Nuclear Stress Rule

The Nuclear Stress Rule specifies that the strongest stress in a phrase will fall as far back, i. e., as close to the end as possible. See Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm" 269, 257 and Kiparsky, "Stress, Syntax, and Meter" 579, 581).

Phonological Phrase

A phonological phrase is any syntactically determined phrase structure, e.g., a noun, verb or prepositional phrase. These phrases mark the "locations of optional or obligatory intonation breaks, corresponding to caesuras in verse" (Kiparsky, "Stress, Syntax, and Meter" 579, 581).

Prosody

Prosody has to do with the prominence and non-prominence of linguistic features such as stress, syllabification, quantity, phrasing and intonation. It is the grammar of rhythm. See Cureton, DM 3-4 for more.

Quatrain

A quatrain is a four line stanza.

Rhythm

Rhythm is "a global term covering all relations of strength and weakness" (Attridge, BM 11).

Rhythm Rule

The Rhythm Rule specifies that the stress on a word will be retracted (i.e., moved forward) in order to avoid consecutively stressed syllables. For instance, words like "thirteen" or "Tennessee" will have their strongest stress moved from their last to their first syllables when they are joined to subsequent words beginning with a stressed syllable, e.g., Tennessee walking horse. This rule reflects the tendency in English towards alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. For more, see Kiparsky, "The Rhythmic Structure of English Verse" 218 ff.

Scansion

"The scansion of a line provides a graphic representation of the relationship between the metrical pattern and the stress pattern; that is, it shows which metrical rules are employed at particular points to realize beats and offbeats. It therefore directly reflects the way in which the line is perceived as rhythmically regular, indicating the degree and exact nature of metrical deviation at every stage" (Attridge, REP 361). Attridge here refers to his own beat-offbeat system but all forms of scansion use some sort of graphic representation to represent stress; the generative system uses trees and traditional scansion uses the long and short stress marks of classical meters.

Stress

Stress is the prominence given to certain syllables in a sequence. Within a sequence, stress is both relative and hierarchical.

Unmetrical

A line is unmetrical, in generative terms, when an s in the verse instance occurs in a metrical w position simultaneously with a bracketing mismatch. See Example 26.

Verse Instance

Verse instance refers to an actual line of poetry as opposed to the abstract metrical pattern.

Versification

Versification "deals with those conventionalized language patterns that develop in specific cultural traditions in order to enable (and constrain) poetic composition" (Cureton, DM 4).

Word Rule

The Word Rule explains how to build up the tree structures for words with more than one stress. Liberman states the Word Rule as follows: "In a pair of sister nodes N1 N2, N2 is s if and only if it branches" (Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm" 268). See Example 6.

Sources for Examples

1. Traditional nursery rhyme

2. Traditional nursery rhyme, taken from PR 58
3. Ellen Stauder
4. Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 267
5. Ellen Stauder
6. Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 268
7. Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 267-268
8. Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 269
9. Ellen Stauder
10. Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 256
11. Ellen Stauder
12. Adapted from Liberman, "On Stress and Linguistic Rhythm," 310
13. Ellen Stauder
14. Shakespeare, Sonnet 18: 8; Shakespeare, Sonnet 15: 7
15. Shakespeare, Sonnet 18: 6
16. Shakespeare, Sonnet 55: 7; Shakespeare, Sonnet 18: 3
17. Shakespeare, Sonnet 140
18. Marvell, "The Garden," 48; discussed in Attridge, REP, 183
19. Keats, "How many bards . . . ," ; discussed in Attridge, REP, 185
20. Donne, Sonnet 10: 11
21. Milton, "When I consider how my light is spent," 7-14
22. Milton, "When I consider how my light is spent," 8-10
23. Shakespeare, Sonnet 19: 2
24. Shakespeare, Richard III 5, line 29; taken from Kiparsky, "Rhythmic Structure of English Verse," 189, 196
25. Shelley, "Ozymandias," 7
26. Shakespeare, Sonnet 138: 7; Shakespeare, Sonnet 55: 12
27. Shakespeare, Richard III 5: 29
28. Donne, "Batter my heart . . . ," 1-2
29. Spenser, Sonnet 37 from Amoretti
30. Shakespeare, Sonnet 129

Sources for Exercises

1. Ellen Stauder
2. Ellen Stauder
3. Ellen Stauder
4. Ellen Stauder with a borrowing from Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"
5. Shakespeare, Sonnet 19: 8; Sidney, Sonnet XXI from Astrophel and Stella: 7
6. Shakespeare, Sonnet 19: 4
7. Shakespeare, Sonnet 19: 6
8. Shelley, "Ozymandias," 7; Donne, "A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day" (taken from REP 185)
9. Shelley, "Ozymandias," 12-14
10. Sidney, Sonnet XXI from Astrophel and Stella: 7; Milton, "When I consider how my light is spent," 14

11. Donne, "Batter my heart . . . ," 1; Sidney, Sonnet XXI from Astrophel and Stella: 3
12. Shakespeare, Sonnet 64

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