

## Some Suggestions for Text Analysis of Shakespeare

1. Read the play at one sitting.
2. Use the Shakespeare Lexicon and a good dictionary.
3. Write paraphrases of your text.
4. Bracket complete thought groups.
5. Underline operative (image) words.
6. Mark scansion.
7. Pay close attention to the last word of each line as it drives the journey of the text and meter.
8. Analyze sentence structure and mark primary subject, verb, object.
  - When reading the play, do it in a quiet place where you can allow yourself to meet the words for the first time (even if you know the play well).
  - With the Lexicon and dictionary, look up words you know as well as those you don't. I generally use the Arden Shakespeare (great notes and definitions) and the Riverside editions.

Scansion — The analysis and identification of stress patterns in a poem.

Shakespeare wrote in both **prose** and **poetry**. When writing in poetry he used one meter almost exclusively. It consists of a sequence of five stressed syllables, each preceded by an unstressed syllable — short -- long. This is called **Iambic Pentameter**. Occasionally he inverted the foot into long -- short, most frequently at the beginning of a line. This foot is called a **trochee**.

U -- U -- U -- U -- U --

Helen/ to you/our minds/ we will/ unfold.

U -- U -- U -- U -- U --

Tomorrow night/when Phoebe doth behold

U -- U -- U -- U -- U --

Her silver visage in'the watery glass,

-- U U -- U -- U -- U --

Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass —

Occasionally two strong syllables come together. This is called a **Spondee**. Trochees and spondees are the most common of the irregular feet in Shakespeare.

-- -- U -- U -- -- --

Blow, winds/and crack/ your cheeks!/ Rage, blow!

King Lear

**Punctuation** — In general, I use punctuation as a suggestion. Shakespeare himself was probably not responsible for the punctuation we find in his plays. That was the job of the stage manager or some editor. But you have to start somewhere. Periods, question marks and exclamation points (and in a few cases dashes) indicate complete thoughts.

**Feminine Ending** (a.k.a. weak ending) — An extra, unstressed syllable at the end of a line. Can be a clue denoting uncertainty, turbulence, emotional change. An internal feminine ending can occur in a line of poetry usually before a strong bit of punctuation.

U -- U -- U -- -- U U -- U

To be, /or not/ to be, / that is /the question:

-- U U -- U -- U -- U -- U

Whether / tis no/bler in/ the mind/to suffer

U -- U -- U -- U -- U -- U

The slings/ and ar/rows of/ outra/geous fortune,

U -- U -- U -- U -- U -- U

Or to/take arms against a sea of troubles

U -- U -- U -- U

And by/ oppos/ing end/ them.

Hamlet, III, 1, 56

**Elision** — Running the end of one word into the beginning of the next. You move through an elision quickly to preserve the meter of the poetry.

Here to this place i'th'open air, before  
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,  
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,  
That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.

The Winter's Tale, III, ii

**Antithesis** — Opposites or comparisons within a line or thought. (good thing/bad thing)

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb.  
What is her burying grave, that is her womb;

Romeo and Juliet, III, ii

**Contraction**-- Shortening the word so that two syllables become one without sacrificing meaning.

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

R&J, II, 2

**Expansion** — Lengthening words by the addition of an extra sound or extra length of sound. Also in support of the meter.

--  
"Tybalt is dead, and Romeo banished."  
--

That "banished" that one word "banished,"  
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts. Tybalt's death  
Was woe enough if it had ended there;

R&J, III, 2

**Caesura** — Because of the length of a five beat line, there is almost always a break in the line, a natural beat usually after the second or third stressed syllable.

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we make our scene,

R&J Prologue

**Assonance** — Repetition of a vowel sound in neighboring words or syllables in a line.

Unwhipt of justice! Hide thee, thou bloody hand;

Lear, III,2

**Consonance** — Repetition of consonant sounds in neighboring words in a line, especially at the end of stressed syllables. (see above)

**Alliteration** — The repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables.

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!

**Onomatopoeia** — The naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it. (Howl, buzz, hiss)

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!

Sources: **Shakespeare Spoken Here**, by Dakin Matthews and **The Actor and the Text**, by Cicely Berry.

**DEFINITION: OPERATIVE WORD(S):** THE WORD OR WORDS UPON WHICH AN IMAGE PHRASE DEPENDS FOR ITS MEANING; THE WORDS OR WORDS WITHOUT WHICH THERE WOULD BE NO IMAGE; THE WORDS YOU CAN'T DO WITHOUT; THE WORDS FROM WHICH THE LISTENER CAN GUESS THE REST.

1. Articles (“a”, “an”, “the”), prepositions (“to”, “from”, “in”, “on”, “with”, etc.) And - conjunctions (“and”, “but”, etc.) are usually not operatives. They contain no images, but serve to show the relationships between images. Such relationships are usually conveyed in speaking by the inflections with which you link one image to another; the inflections are the natural result of your imaging process as you speak.
2. Stress not the negative. “No” and “not” are almost never operative. They contain no images, but serve instead to negate other images. The operative word is therefore the word that is being negated. “I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.” “Do not say so.”
3. Verbs of being (“am”, “is”, “was”, “shall”) are rarely operative. The operative words are instead the words that explain the kind or quality of being. “I am king.” “Thou shalt be king.” “I am happy.” “I am in love.” “He is my brother.”
4. Adjectives and adverbs should be treated as part of the noun or verb they modify and incorporated in the image. The key operative word is the noun or verb, with the adjective or adverb incorporated into the image as a modifier that qualifies the meaning of the noun or verb. “She’s a nice girl.” “Let’s have a good time.” “He’s a tired old fool.”
5. The same guideline applies to possessive nouns. “My father’s house.”
6. Avoid stressing pronouns whenever it is possible to do so. (“he”, “she”, “it”, etc.) Whenever there is an alternative that makes sense, use it. This includes possessive pronouns (“his”, “her”, “my”, etc.) Pronouns are used in speech usually as a substitute form for a noun which it has become unnecessary to stress. “I saw Helena. She told me she didn’t love me.”
7. Repetitive contrast: an image that is repeated is not operative. What is operative is any new quality that is added in the repetition. “I wanted a red shirt . I got a blue shirt.”
8. Generally speaking, nouns are more operative than verbs — think about trying to communicate with someone who doesn’t speak English — the first thing they must understand is the subject of the image, then what the subject is doing.

**SCANSION:** The important thing is that there be FIVE LONG BEATS per line. Whether you make something an anapest or a feminine ending, or scan by doing an elision between syllables, the result is ultimately THE SAME. The rest is for people writing scholarly treatises. What is important is that you find the UNDERLYING METRIC STRUCTURE and IDENTIFY WHERE THE IMAGES ARE PLACED within that structure. If you speak the images, you will speak in a wide variety of inner rhythms and phrase-lengths, and metric structure will support you.

IAMB U --	TROchee	-- U
DACTyl(l) -- UU	anaPEST	U U --
SPON-DEE -- --	pyr-rhic	UU

Iambic first with firm and steady pace;  
 Then the trochee follows to replace it;  
 In comes the dactyl with energy sizzling,  
 The amphibrach next with its beat in the middle,  
 And behind all the rest comes the quick anapaest.  
 'Me too!' 'Who's he?' "Spondee!"

/ / - / - / b̄ic first / with firm / and stea- / - / dy pace;  
 Then the / trochee / follows / <sup>changing places</sup> / ~~to re-~~ / - / place it;  
 / / comes the / dactyl with / energy / sizzling,  
 The amphi- / - / brach next with / its beat in / the middle,  
 And behind / all the rest / comes the quick / anapaest.  
 / / 'Me too!' / / 'Who's he?' / / "Spondee!"

/ / weak strong  
 / - strong weak  
 / / strong weak weak  
 / / weak strong weak  
 / / weak weak strong  
 / / strong strong

We hit the words we want the world to hear

English stresses words that really matter

Speaking with emphasis lends us authority

By being emphatic we sound more dramatic

It's the words that we stress that give shape to our speech

Speak clear, make sense, sound strong

Romeo

If I profane with my unworhiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Romeo

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Juliet

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in pray'r.

Romeo

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!  
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Juliet

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.  
Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purg'd.

Juliet

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

Romeo

Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urg'd!  
Give me my sin again.

Juliet

You kiss by th' book.

**BENEDICK**

If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

**BEATRICE**

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

**BENEDICK**

What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

**BEATRICE**

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

**BENEDICK**

Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart; for, truly, I love none.

**BEATRICE**

A dear happiness to women: they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

**BENEDICK**

God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

**BEATRICE**

Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

**BENEDICK**

Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

**BEATRICE**

A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

**BENEDICK**

I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's name; I have done.

**BEATRICE**

You always end with a jade's trick: I know you of old.



**LADY MACBETH**

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now to look so green and pale  
At what it did so freely? From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that  
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'  
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

**LADY MACBETH**

Was the hope drunk wherein you dress'd yourself?  
Hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now to look so green and pale at what it did so freely?  
From this time such I account thy love.  
Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valour as thou art in desire?  
Wouldst thou have that which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,  
[and live a coward in thine own esteem],  
letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' like the poor cat i' the adage?

**LADY MACBETH**

Was the hope drunk wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since? And wakes  
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