

Class 3, 4/6/15: Basics of Iambic Pentameter

1. Course bureaucracy

- Start reading:
 - Hayes, Bruce, Colin Wilson, and Anne Shisko (2012) Maxent grammars for the metrics of Shakespeare and Milton. *Language* 88:691-731.
- Think about term paper projects — what data would you like to analyze?

IAMBIC PENTAMETER: ORIENTATION

2. One example: Shakespeare's Sonnet 19

- Cliff notes:
 - This is written to the *fair youth* and comes just after the *procreation sonnets*: rich parents pay Shakespeare to write sonnets urging their (physically beautiful) son to marry and have children.¹
 - Theme of the cruelty of time in destroying the fair youth's beauty (the basis of the propaganda in the procreation sonnets)
 - A type found fairly often: 12 lines of ode to the beauty of the beloved (the fair youth), 2 lines of boasting by the poet.

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-liv'd phoenix, in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O! carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
Him in thy course untainted do allow
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
Yet, do thy worst old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

¹ Golly, the story goes on ... Shakespeare falls madly in love with the fair youth; he's also involved with a dark lady, whom for some reason he utterly despises. She eventually takes up with the fair youth, who prefers her company to Shakespeare's. Dozens of different moods; rage, self-loathing, and despair are standouts. The 154 sonnets later got published, probably in slightly scrambled order. W. H. Auden thinks the publication was not authorized by Shakespeare.

3. Some lit stuff as preamble²

- The earliest important English iambic pentameter poet was Geoffrey Chaucer, roughly end of 14th century—borrowing from Romance, particularly Italian models.
- Chaucer had the misfortune of writing just before the sound change *ə → Ø / ____]word, which led to a period of centuries when his metrical intent was not understood.
- The iambic pentameter was then *rediscovered* in the first half of the 1500's (Tudor poets: Wyatt, Surrey), and bloomed in the Elizabethan era.
- It had tremendous staying power, dominating English literature through the 19th century, and continues to be composed to this day.

4. Meter

- The iambic pentameter meter is often noted as

W S W S W S W S W S

where

S = strong rhythmic beat

W = weak rhythmic beat

- People often “recite the meter” using nonsense syllables like [də] and [ˈdʌ:].
- We can consider S and W as shorthand for grid columns:

			x			x			x			x			x			x
x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

- Height = prominence of beat
- Rows = sequences of beats at varying hierarchical levels.

5. Scansion

- Scansion is the establishment of correspondence, not necessarily one-to-one, of the syllables of a line to the meter.
- We “scan” a line by notating this correspondence.

De vour ing Time, blunt thou the li on's paws,

W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W

- If you want to save space, you can do it like this:

² This is me speaking as Joe Q. Public, reference sources needed.

Devour- / ing Time, / blunt thou / the li- / on's paws

- Occasionally there is more than one (discussed later) and one ordinarily provides the most probable one according to a good theory.

6. Communicating a scansion to other people

- ... is often done by using an artificial prosody that communicates the meter rather than the phonological structure—stress and lengthen the strong positions.
- Such a rendering is sometimes called the “**schoolboy**” scansion.

TRADITIONAL LORE ON THE IAMBIC PENTAMETER METER

7. Basics

- An iambic pentameter consists of **five iambic feet**, each of which consists of a weak syllable followed by a strong.
- This is the general scheme, but it is adhered to only by **approximation**, with many unexpected weak syllables where you would expect strong, and vice versa.
- However, some **deviations** are so systematic as to be worth noting.

8. Extrametrical syllables

- It is common for the poet to allow an extra stressless syllable (how stressless?) at the end of a line.
- Sonnet 20 is unusual in exercising this option for all 14 lines:

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted,
 Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
 With shifting change, as is false women's fashion:
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
 A man in hue all 'hues' in his controlling,
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
 And for a woman wert thou first created;
 Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
 And by addition me of thee defeated,
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
 But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
 Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.

9. Extrametrical syllables in dramatic verse

In the looser system Shakespeare used for dramas, extrametricals can occur provided they are

- after S
- at a strong “break”, in a sense to be defined—intuitively, a place that deserves comma or stronger punctuation.
- Weakly stressed, in some sense that must be determined, and which varies from poet to poet.

[Find the extrametricals in these lines (Kiparsky 1977, 231-232):]

Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine	<i>Cymbeline</i>
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Must curtsy at this censure. Oh, boys, this story	<i>Cymbeline</i>
Oh, what a war of looks was then between them!	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>

10. Supernumerary syllables for phonological reasons

All these I better in one general best.	Sonnets, above
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.	Sonnet 74
Poor forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus	(T. G. V. 1.2.124)
To emblaze the Honor that thy Master got	(2H6 4.10.76)
Take heed of perjury, thou art on thy deathbed	(Oth. 5.2.51)
Who? Silvia? / Aye, Silvia, for / your sake	(T. G. V. 4.2.25)
Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered	(Son. 124)

11. Paraphonology

- Kiparsky (1977) hypothesizes a **paraphonology**³ (his “prosodic rules”), which can derive phonological representations used for poetry.

Formalizing, we can state the two most important paraphonological rules as follows:

Prevocalic Desyllabification

[+syllabic] → [-syllabic] / ____ [+syllabic]

Where the output segment is legal in English.⁴

Posttonic Schwa Drop

ə → ∅ / [+syllabic] ____

³ More often, he uses the term **prosodic rules**, which I feel is too ambiguous.

⁴ Easy to do this if you’re using OT.

12. Another familiar parophonological rule

Ambisyllabic /v/ Drop

$$v \rightarrow \emptyset / V \text{ — } \left[\begin{array}{c} V \\ \text{—stress} \end{array} \right]$$

Ordering: feeds Posttonic Schwa Drop

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate,

This gives rise to still-familiar “poetry pronunciations”: *o'er, e'er, e'en, se'ennight*
So there might be a “paralexicon” for poetry

13. What is parophonology?

- Optional rules in the phonology of Shakespeare's day?
- Milton: it looks much more like a system he invented, borrowing from Romance and Latin phonology.
- In Kwara'ae (Micronesian), there is even a special formal register (historically archaic) used in poetry and song⁵

14. Inversion

- At the beginning of the line, it is common for the stress to be “**inverted**”; that is, we get a stressed syllable in the initial weak position, and a stressless in the following strong position.
- Less often, the same pattern is observed in the third or fourth foot, when preceded by a large **break** (more on breaks later).
- This line has an initial inversion:

Canker'd with peace, to part your canker'd hate.

Romeo and Juliet

- These are medial inversions:

Of heavier on himself, fearless return'd.
And peace proclaims olives of endless age

Milton, *Paradise Lost*
Sonnets

- The second seems “tenser” than the first, for its break is feeble.

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[1] Jeffrey Heinz. **CV Metathesis in Kwara'ae**. Master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004. [[bib](#) | [pdf](#)]

- We need a theory of the strength of breaks.
- Both of the inversions in the preceding lines are **lexical** inversions, meaning the two syllables are in the same word. Here is a **non-lexical** inversion:

Throw your mis-temper'd weapons to the ground,

Romeo and Juliet

[Find all of the inversions in this Sonnet and classify them as lexical or non-lexical.]

XCI

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
 Some in their wealth, some in their body's force,
 Some in their garments though new-fangled ill;
 Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;
 And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,
 Wherein it finds a joy above the rest:
 But these particulars are not my measure,
 All these I better in one general best.
 Thy love is better than high birth to me,
 Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
 Of more delight than hawks and horses be;
 And having thee, of all men's pride I boast:
 Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take
 All this away, and me most wretched make.

- Every once in a while, inversions can take place in any foot:

Never, never, never, never, never

King Lear

15. Summarizing the conventional wisdom theory

- five iambic feet
- matching is good, but not great (only 12% perfect stress matching in the Hayes/Wilson/Shisko corpus)
- inversion at particular locations
- extrametricals at particular locations
- extra syllables can be trimmed back by phonological processes

LESS-OBVIOUS STUFF ABOUT PENTAMETER

16. Working more rigorously

- We linguists ought to be able to find subtler things, drawing our theoretical understanding of phonological structure and our practice in scrutinizing data with great care.
- This actually seems to have happened, mostly with the work of Paul Kiparsky in the 1970's.

- Milton *every once in a while* mismatches a lexical stress not after a break:⁶

Thus, what thou desirest
And what thou fear'st, alike destroys all hope
Of refuge, and concludes thee miserable
Beyond all past example and future.

but not at the end of a word, as in “immense teeth” (an endings-strict effect? more later)

⁶ The end of a long discourse; Adam addresses himself, realizing he has committed not just sin but *original* sin, dooming all of humanity.