

APPRECIATING
SHAKESPEAREAN
&
MODERN PLAYS

WORKSHOP
FOR TEACHERS

2 MAY 2024

DR. NICHOLAS LUKE, DR. BETH HARPER, DR. KRISTEN MURRAY
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH, THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

WILLIAM HAZLITT

“In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternative affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought into contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances.

...

The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projections. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process.”

William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818

SHAKESPEARE:

FATHERS &
DAUGHTERS

KING LEAR

MIDLINE BREAKS

Midline breaks (i.e. caesuras, short lines, shared lines or other disruptions to rhythm) illuminate textual analysis and performance

- In Shakespeare's earlier plays, sentence completions in verse are more likely to match with line endings.
- In Shakespeare's later plays, which contain far more prose, midline breaks (of various types) are more common and often occur slightly later (i.e. past halfway) within a line.
- Midline breaks related to punctuation evoke short pauses, breaths, shifts in gaze, slight movements; short lines may cause more abrupt changes in emotional register, respiration, movement.
- Shared lines demonstrate connection, engagement and perception.

KING LEAR - ACT 1, SCENE 1

How do midline breaks affect the reading of lines?

LEAR

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest born, speak first.

GONERIL

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the
matter,
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;

MIDLINE BREAKS

- In the more mature plays, the increased incidents of midline breaks - and the shift to a later location - creates more **enjambment** and makes the language seem **natural, intense** and forward-leaning.

THE TEMPEST – ACT 2, SCENE 1

GONZALO

It is foul weather in us all, good sir,
When you are cloudy.

SEBASTIAN

Foul weather?

ANTONIO

Very foul.

GONZALO

Had I plantation of this isle, my lord—

ANTONIO

He'd sow 't with nettle seed.

Colyvas K, Egan G, Craig H. Changes in the length of speeches in the plays of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries: A mixed

models approach. PLoS One. 2023 Apr 21;18(4):e0282716. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0282716.

MIDLINE BREAKS

In the second half of Shakespeare's playwriting career, **midline breaks** seem to not only inform or affect **relationships between characters**, but also (or alternatively) “indicate a **change in emotion, manner, or address** that does not take over from a previous orientation, but rather coexists with it”

(Palfrey and Stern: 2007: online)

Thus, a midline break can:

- indicate or change aspects of the relationship (in dialogue)
- reveal the internal concerns of the speaker
- mark a physical change or interruption in the situation
- point to more than one of the above experiences.

Palfrey, Simon, and Tiffany Stern, 'Midline Shifts in 'Mature' Shakespeare: From Actorly Instruction to 'Virtual' Presence', *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford, 2007; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199272051.003.0020>

SHARED LINES

As a general guide, shared lines can indicate a/an:

- emotional bond (fraternal, paternal, maternal and/or romantic)
- quick wit
- disrespectful servant, enemy, relative
- argument/debate
- crisis: rapid, unexpected events and/or urgent decisions

The majority of theatre practitioners suggest that shared lines are best spoken straight after one another.

Other directors/actors occasionally find space to pause, although these disruptions affect the pace of a production significantly – even more than caesuras or short lines.

MIDLINE BREAKS

How does the analysis of shared lines (i.e. characters finishing/continuing from another's partial line) illuminate these characters' relationship?

Drama exercises

A Scene in King Lear

List the possible meanings of silence.

Choose a suitable sound to play underneath this scene. When may it stop?

How would you stage the three daughters in relation to King Lear? Draw or embody positions and justify these decisions.

SHAKESPEARE:

CHARACTER
TRANSFORMATION

KING LEAR

KING LEAR – THE STORM

LEAR My wits begin to turn.

Come on, my boy. How dost my boy? Art cold?

I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?

The art of our necessities is strange

And can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.

Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart

That's sorry yet for thee.

(3.2.67-73)

KING LEAR – THE STORM

LEAR Prithee, go in thyself; seek thine own ease.
This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
On things would hurt me more, but I'll go in.
[to FOOL] In, boy, go first. You houseless poverty,
Nay, get thee in; I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.

(3.4.24-37)

KING LEAR – MADNESS

LEAR

Ha! Goneril with a white beard? They flattered me like a dog and tole me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say “Ay” and “No” to everything that I said “Ay” and “No” to was no good divinity. When the rain cam to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found ’em, there I smelt ’em out. Go to, they are not men o’their words. They told me I was everything. ’Tis a lie. I am not ague-proof.

(4.6.97-105)

KING LEAR – MADNESS

LEAR

What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes
with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yond justice
rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear. Change
places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the
thief? Though hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar?

GLOUCESTER Ay, sir.

LEAR And the creature run from the cur. There thou mightst
behold the great image of authority; a dog's obeyed in office.
(4.6.146-153)

Robes and furred gowns hide all.
(4.6.159)

KING LEAR – RECONCILIATION

CORDELIA [kneeling] Oh, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hand in benediction o'er me.

[LEAR kneels.]

You must not kneel.

LEAR [rising] Pray, do not mock me.

I am a very foolish, fond old man,

Fourscore and upward,

Not an hour more nor less,

And to deal plainly,

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

(4.7.53-60)

KING LEAR – RECONCILIATION

LEAR Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA And so I am. I am.

LEAR Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause; they have not.

CORDELIA No cause, no cause.

(4.7.65-72)

SHAKESPEARE:

FATHER &
DAUGHTER

OTHELLO

SHORTER SPEECHES

In the second half of Shakespeare's playwriting career, the shift “towards dialogue with shorter speeches seems intuitively to [be] a closer modelling of natural speech.” (Colvyas and Egan, 2023)

How do shorter speeches affect the energy of a scene?

OTHELLO - Act I, Scene 3

OTHELLO

So justly to your grave ears I'll present.
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine.

DUKE Say it, Othello.

OTHELLO Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life—
the ⟨battles,⟩ sieges, ⟨fortunes⟩
That I have passed.

OTHELLO: ACT 1, SC 3

How do the midline breaks alert us to Brabantio's dismay?

BRABANTIO God be with you! I have done. 220

Please it your Grace, on to the state affairs.

I had rather to adopt a child than get it.—

Come hither, Moor.

I here do give thee that with all my heart

[Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart]

I would keep from thee.—For your sake, jewel, 225

I am glad at soul I have no other child,

For thy escape would teach me tyranny,

To hang clogs on them.—I have done, my lord.

Drama exercises

A scene in *Othello*

Embody/enact
Othello's life
stories through
physicality
(pictorial scenes
or group
movement)

Stage Desdemona's
explanation of falling
in love in front of her
father. Consider how
stage position reveals
relationships.

Drama exercises

An image of
Othello

Embody/enact
Othello's life
stories through
physicality
(pictorial scenes
or group
movement)

Stage Desdemona's
explanation of falling
in love in front of her
father. Consider how
stage position reveals
relationships.

Drama exercises

A scene in Othello

```
graph LR; A((A scene in Othello)) --- B((Verbalise/enact a parent's possible response in modern language and social conditions.)); A --- C((List/debate Desdemona's motives for eloping w/ Othello)); A --- D((Work backwards from the end of the scene, asking 'but why?' re: each line));
```

Verbalise/enact a parent's possible response in modern language and social conditions.

List/debate Desdemona's motives for eloping w/ Othello

Work backwards from the end of the scene, asking 'but why?' re: each line