The cult of Shakespeare the poet began early and continued late. As recently as 1954, F. E. Halliday observed, "The plays must be read as we read the works of Milton or any other non-dramatic poet. To hear in a theatre a Shakespearean play that we do not know almost by heart is to miss half its beauty."¹

Today few students of theater would accept this assessment. Without denying the beauty of Shakespeare's poetry when read, they would place much greater emphasis on the idea that dramatic speech must be understood as a text for performance. Keir Elam puts the position as follows in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*:

Since, chronologically, the writing of the play precedes any given performance, it might appear quite legitimate to suppose the simple priority of the one over the other. But it is equally legitimate to claim that it is the performance, or at least a possible or 'model' performance, that constrains the dramatic text in its very articulation. The 'incompleteness' factor—that is, the constant pointing within a dialogue to a non-described context—suggests that the dramatic text is radically conditioned by its performability. The written text, in other words, is determined by its very need for stage contextualization, and indicates throughout its allegiance to the physical conditions of performance.²
It is difficult to discuss dramatic dialogue without terms that identify the performance aspect of dialogue—the qualities that are present in it because it is “conditioned by performability.” The term “actorly” has been used in connection with the dialogue of Heywood’s Seneca translations and Gorboduc and will continue to be used below.

An actorly text is written for performance rather than reading. It is “conditioned by its performability.” It is a potential. Part of the potential may be evident from the words themselves. In chapter 14 of the Poetics (1456b9–18), Aristotle notes that the figures of diction include “what a command is, what a prayer is, what a statement is, what a threat and question and answer [are] and any other such matters.” An interrogative sentence, for example, is actorly in itself because it implies a specific voice intonation and is associated with complementary gestures—raised eyebrows, a shrug of the shoulders, and the like. The illocutionary aspect of language is controlled, at least in part, by construction. In terms of construction an actorly text must have two features. It must be speakable—and comprehensible when spoken; and it must invite the actor’s voice to explore and express the causes it implies.

An important part of the potential of dramatic speech is invisible on the page. It arises not from language but from context—from such elements as the relation of speaker to stage props, the eye contacts and gestures of the character to whom the speech is directed, the deployment of nonspeaking characters around the speaker. Actorly speech is a score for performance. It is only realized—it only “means what it says”—when it is integrated with everything else happening on the stage. Moreover, actorly speeches can always be vocally enacted in several ways. Whether or not a given enactment is valid depends on the specific production in which it occurs as well as the words in the text.

A good verse dramatist writes actorly speeches, not poems. Their meanings are intended to be discovered during rehearsal and cannot ever be fully present on the page. This is why it is difficult for writers of narrative, who create texts for readers, to write effective drama, and why dramatic scripts that are richly complex when performed can seem thin when read.

A theater is from one point of view a repository of conventions. The conventions include those forced on it by the design of its stage,
those established by audience expectations, and those established by performance traditions. Actorly speech is written in accord with the conventions of its theater, which are certain to be different from the conventions of a theater in a different country or a different century. To a much greater degree than the language of a poem or narrative, it is a code. The break that occurred in 1642 with the closing of the English theaters was a deep fracture. After it, the world of Shakespeare's dramas could be evoked as a memory but never fully recovered.

How does a dramatist learn to write actorly speeches if there is no established theater for which to write them? This was the dilemma of the dramatists who wrote in England before the later 1580s. They were creating conventions rather than absorbing and modifying them. They had to rely on what was available. One body of theory that related directly to the problem of writing actorly speeches was the ars metrica. Two other useful sources of information were the dramas of Seneca and the ancient rhetorical formulas for making orations.

**Opsis and Illocution**

As early as Plato's *Republic* the requirement that dialogue be "like speech" is related to a larger concept of genre. In book 3 of the *Republic* (392C) Socrates defines two genres of poetry. They are genres based on the place of the author in the work. One is narrative (diegetic), the other dramatic or imitative (mimetic). After quoting a passage from Homer that has both description and direct quotation, Socrates observes that in the descriptive part, "the poet speaks in his own person and does not in any way attempt to make us suppose that anyone else than himself is talking." Conversely, in the direct quotation, "the poet attempts to make it seem to us as though it were not Homer who is speaking but the priest, who is an old man."

For Aristotle, all poetry is imitation because poetry is the making of plots, and plots are imitations of actions. The other five parts of a tragedy help objectify the imitation. Diction objectifies it by making character and thought manifest in words. Horace is recalling this idea when he observes in the *Ars poetica* that iambic meter is "born for action" (*natum rebus agendis*, l. 82). Complementing diction in the *Poetics* are "song" and "spectacle" (*opsis*).

"Song" may be self-explanatory, but "spectacle" has always given commentators difficulty. Does it refer to the play as seen—that is,
scenery and costume and the physical motions of actors on a stage? Evidence can be offered in favor of this interpretation, but it appears to be contradicted by two points that Aristotle makes very emphatic. First, the parts of a tragedy are inherent in the tragedy—none of them is “added” by performance. And second, all of the parts of a tragedy can be appreciated when read as well as when the work is acted.

In Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument Gerald Else proposes a solution. Commenting on Aristotle’s first reference to opsis (49b33), he concludes, “The characters must be thought of . . . as being in certain places, being on or off stage at certain times, etc. These are necessities that a dramatist cannot dodge, a condition which he has laid upon himself by the act of writing a play, and which necessarily must affect the way he writes it and the way a reader—indpendently of any actual performance—will visualize it.” The interpretation is brilliantly developed in a comment on chapter 17 (55a22–32), where the poet is advised to “visualize the action” and “work it out with the figures.” Aristotle’s word for “figures” is schemata, and Else argues persuasively that it is a reference to the schemata lexeos discussed in chapter 19 of the Poetics, that is, the illocutionary forms of language—questioning, commanding, threatening, pleading, declaiming, praying, and the like.

This interpretation makes “spectacle” the adjustment of the language to the fact that it will be performed. The fact that such an adjustment is made is obvious from the physical difference between a narrative and a play script. The narrative is continuous, while the play script is divided into speeches. But the difference goes much deeper than that. The play script is to be spoken by agents represented physically on stage. The speeches all have motives, and the motives precede the speeches, being their causes.

The illocutionary quality of dialogue implies a speaking voice, not the chant of the professional rhapsodist. Hence iambic meter, hence the avoidance of epic similes, hence the simplicity of the vocabulary of drama as compared with the vocabulary of epic. Hence, too, the emphasis on a syntax that expresses intention and motive through the schemata.

But this is not the end of the story. In advising the dramatist to “visualize” the action, Aristotle is recognizing that the speeches must reflect awareness of where the agents are at all times. Certain arrangements will be physically impossible. Others may be possible but risk being ludicrous if performed. In other cases—the presence of Megaera and her serpents at the beginning of Thyestes is an example—a char-
acter may be silent but may shape the speech of another character. When writing the speech, the dramatist must keep the silent character vividly present in imagination and write the speech in terms of what the silent character is understood to be doing while the speech proceeds. For example, even though it is not verbalized, a lunge by Me-egaera must be complemented by a verbal equivalent of flinching in the speech composed for Tantalus.

If a performance of *Thyestes* includes such a lunge, it seems to the audience to be a cause, and the "flinch" in the speech seems to be its effect. This is a curious situation. In real life, cause precedes effect and leads to it. In a dramatic script the situation is reversed. The script, which is the effect, comes first, and the cause must be deduced from it and then inserted into the play in order to create the illusion of real life. Yet the causes are the life of the play. They arise from the action that the play is imitating and thus from what Aristotle calls its "soul."

We will return to this point. For the present we note that it is the equivalent in ancient critical theory of the concept of actorly dialogue. The ability of ancient dramatists to write actorly speeches is especially clear in the comic dialogue of Plautus and Terence, but it is discernible, as we have seen, in the tragedies of Seneca, even though they were probably written for declamation. A memory of what constitutes actorly dialogue is preserved in these dramas.

A memory of the actorly nature of dialogue is also preserved in the common late classical distinction among manners of imitation. Diomedes, for example, observes that certain kinds of verse are "biotic" because they are like speech. He begins his chapter "On Poems" with a comment on the kinds of literature as determined by manner of imitation: "There are three kinds of poem—a poem is either 'active' or 'imitative,' which the Greeks call *dramatikon* or *mimetikon*; or it is narrative or 'presentational,' which the Greeks call *exegetikon* or *apangeltikon*; or it is common or 'mixed,' which the Greeks call *koinon* or *mikton." The influential renaissance commentary of Badius Ascensius on Horace's *Ars poetica* begins with the same distinctions.

In a print-oriented culture it is almost impossible not to read dramatic speeches as words on a page. However, whether we take Keir Elam's semiotics or Aristotle's *opsis* or Diomedes' concept of biotic verse or his three genres as our basis, the words on the page must be considered as potential rather than adequate symbols of their own meaning.
To regard dramatic speech as words on a page is inappropriate because it ignores the basic realities of drama. No dramatist working closely with a group of actors, as the Elizabethan playwrights did, can have failed to understand the fact. When Ben Jonson attacks those who write “furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers” and praises the dramatist who “knowes it is his onely Art so to carry it, as none but Artificers perceive it,” he is making this point in renaissance terms.

**The Mirror of Custom**

Hamlet explains that the purpose of drama is “to hold, as ’t were, the mirror up to nature.” The metaphor should be taken seriously. It opposes life, which we do not see because we are in it, to an image of life, which we can see because it is separate from us. This is precisely the interpretation of the mirror image used in the following exchange between Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*:

Cassius: Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?
Brutus: No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself
   But by reflection, by some other things...
Cassius: Therefore, good Brutus, be prepar’d to hear;
   And since you know you cannot see yourself
   So well, as by reflection, I, your glass,
   Will modestly discover to yourself
   That of yourself which you yet know not of.

(I, ii, 51–70)

In other words, by being a mirror, art shows us what we cannot see otherwise; that is, what we are. The metaphor is especially interesting because an image in a mirror is an illusion. It seems to be like life, but in it, everything is reversed.

In life we are always involved in situations that cause responses. I enter a dining room and notice that the table is set. My response is a question: “What are we having for dinner?” The table set for dinner is the cause of my question. In a play script the sequence is reversed. If it is a renaissance script and lacks detailed stage directions, it will contain a laconic statement followed by dialogue; for example:

*Enter Trencher*

Trench.: What are we having for dinner?
The director must infer from Trencher's question the table and the place-mats and glasses and silverware that are needed to explain why he asks the question. Once inferred, they are put on the stage, and when the play is performed, an illusion is created. The table with its place settings seems to cause the question, as it would do in real life. In fact, however, the question came first and caused the table setting. Without the question there would be no table setting. The play is thus an artifice. It is not an image of life but the illusion of an image, an image in a mirror.

A dramatic speech always arises from a situation, which may be defined as an array of causes. The causes are corollaries of the action being imitated. Some of them are obvious from the speech, which can act as an indirect stage direction. In such cases the task of inferring the causes is simple. Othello says, "Keep up your bright swords." The speech indicates that the characters he is addressing are brandishing swords. Without them the speech would be absurd—an effect without a cause. Once the swords are brandished, the speech seems perfectly reasonable, like a speech in real life.

Are not the speeches in a drama normally caused by other speeches? If character A in a drama asks, "What day is today?" and character B answers, "Wednesday," the question seems to be the cause of the answer. Questions and answers are *schemata*. Is not the "What day is today" sequence a perfect example of dialogue with illocutionary qualities?

Yes and no. The illocutionary element is only the beginning of the actorly significance of the exchange. Any question is obviously one cause of its answer, but it may not be the only cause or the most important one.

Why did the dramatist write A's question? Suppose the question is there to make a point: B is a liar. In this case the audience will have learned previously that today is not Wednesday but Friday. The true cause of B's answer will then be dishonesty, which is a character trait and has nothing to do with the calendar. The question is a strategy to allow the dishonesty to be exhibited. If the dishonesty is not sufficiently obvious from what has already happened, B may wink at the audience while speaking the line (gesture).

Suppose B says "Wednesday" in an agitated whisper. This is because Wednesday is the day A and B plan to escape from prison. The escape is the cause of B's agitation. The microphone hanging from the ceiling of the cell is the cause of the whisper. The microphone is part of the set.
If B shouts "Wednesday!" perhaps this is because A is hard of hearing. Perhaps A has been given a hearing aid by the prop department so the cause cannot be missed. If B says "Wednesday" in an angry tone of voice, this may be because A has been pestering him. If B pauses after A's question and looks at a wall calendar, this is because B is absent-minded or distracted. The wall calendar has been tacked to the wall of the set specifically so that B can look at it before replying.

"Wednesday" is neutral. It has only the general meaning assigned it in the dictionary. It does not take on a precise dramatic meaning until its causes have been discovered and incorporated into set, blocking, costume, gesture, expression, and voice inflection at the moment it is spoken. When all of these elements are present, the word expresses motive as well as meaning. It is part of the play's action as well as its script.

An actorly speech must be constructed so as to be speakable and comprehensible by an audience. Beyond these basic requirements, it must be written in such a way as to invite the exploration of its causes.

The creation of an actorly sequence for a brief speech is nicely illustrated by the three-line speech in which Hamlet notices the presence of Ophelia. Usually these lines are spoken continuously, with brief pauses to separate the three sentences:

Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins rememb'red.

(III, i, 88–90)

The most obvious cause of this speech is the presence of Ophelia, who does not, at this point, have a line. The cause is visual rather than verbal. Ophelia appears, and her presence causes Hamlet's words. Many performances of Hamlet stop there.

In Sir Laurence Olivier's film version of Hamlet the lines are given additional causes. Hamlet is shown walking in a corridor. We know he is convinced Claudius is spying on him. He hears a noise but cannot see who has made it. His line "Soft you now!" means something like "Something unexpected is happening. I must be careful." Note that the presence of Ophelia is not the cause of the speech in Olivier's version, because when Hamlet speaks, he has not yet seen her. After speaking, he walks to the end of the corridor and sees Ophelia. She does not "enter" in this version but is "discovered." Hamlet is relieved and pleased. He exclaims, "The fair Ophelia!" He then walks to her
and takes her arm. He notices she is holding a book. It is the book Polonius gave her before concealing himself behind the arras. It is probably a book of religious devotions because when Polonius gave it to her, he remarked,

'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

(III, i, 47–49)

Olivier's decision to make Ophelia's book a devotional manual is justified by the speech, but it is not inevitable. The reason for Olivier's decision is that seeing the devotional manual becomes the cause for Hamlet's next words to Ophelia: "Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins rememb'red."

Instead of being spoken continuously, the speech in Olivier's version is broken by three extended pauses during which Hamlet (1) discovers Ophelia, (2) walks to her, and (3) notices her book. What is normally a rather bland transition becomes, in this performance, a powerfully charged expression of causes that are at the center of the play. The speech seems perfectly, even transparently, natural, but the naturalness is an illusion created by a cluster of causes put there by the director and actor on the basis of their analysis of the speech in relation to everything happening when it is spoken. It is poetry of the highest order not because it is in verse but because it is perfectly expressive.

Is Olivier's performance "what Shakespeare intended"? On one level the answer is a flat no. Elizabethan stages did not permit characters to wander down corridors and "discover" other characters at their ends. On another level the answer is both yes and no. Yes for two reasons. The enactment could easily be adjusted to Elizabethan stage conditions. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet is ending his soliloquy as Ophelia "enters." There is no reason why he has to be facing her. His "Soft you now!" could be an aside to the audience caused by a noise she makes while walking and made before he sees her. Yes also because the enactment brilliantly exploits the actorly potential of the lines. And no because there is no way of proving or disproving Shakespeare's "intention" for the lines. His general intention when writing the lines was to create a speech that had actorly potential. Quite possibly he was often as surprised and delighted as his audiences by the enactments that Burbage worked out for the first performances of his
scripts. Quite possibly he would have been equally pleased by other enactments.

Desdemona tells a lie about her handkerchief in Othello. It occurs in the following exchange:

Oth.: Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is't out o' the way?
Des.: Heaven bless us!
Oth.: Say you?
Des.: It is not lost; but what an if it were?
Oth.: How?
Des.: I say, it is not lost.

On paper, this seems to be a mild little exchange. Desdemona knows her handkerchief is lost. Why doesn't she admit it? Readers of the play often feel that her equivocation contributes, in a small way, to her downfall.

In a performance several things qualify the words spoken. There is a difference between the physical presence of Othello and Desdemona. He is large, powerful, probably dressed in full uniform. She is slight and weak, probably wearing a white gown. When he asks the questions, there is suppressed violence in his voice. She is not only cautious, she is physically intimidated. Her fear can be made obvious if the actor playing Othello makes a menacing gesture or—even more frightening—begins to make one and then represses it. Her lie thus seems to arise from her fear that Othello may do her physical harm.

On the stage the exchange becomes perfectly clear and brilliantly expressive. It is actorly in the best sense. The fact that it is apparently barren of all ornament illustrates the complete humility of actorly writing. It is committed to its function rather than to making an impression on potential readers. For that very reason, it may be confusing—even disappointing—to anyone who considers Othello poetry to be read.

In certain modern plays—Sam Shepherd’s The Buried Child, for example—lack of causality is one point of the play. Shakespeare’s universe is often strange, but his speeches tend to be richly suggestive of possible causes, and the problem of the Shakespearean actor is to select the causes relevant to a particular dramatic production. Olivier’s enactment of Hamlet’s “Soft you now” speech about Ophelia shows how rich the opportunities are. It also shows that the problem of inferring causes is usually far more difficult—and the options far more numerous—than setting a table so that an actor can say, “What are we having for dinner?”
Properly understood the prosodic analysis of dialogue must begin with its rhythms, which are the rhythms of illocutions shaped by causes. Drinking cups should certainly be used in the tavern scenes in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV* because the speeches mention drinking. But how should the drinking cups relate to the speeches? Should they be banged on the table as punctuation? Should Falstaff drink only at the end of a speech to create a significant pause, or should he freely interrupt the speech with drinks of sack? If so, how often? When?

Pauses in speech are elements of the prosody of the speech. They are usually created by construction, as are illocutions and many other actorly speech elements. We have seen in earlier chapters that the traditions of romance prosody are sensitive to the rhythms of construction—that, in fact, they were probably shaped by these rhythms during the formative age of romance prosody. We have also seen that renaissance schoolmasters explicitly taught the priority of the rhythms of construction over the metrical rhythms of classical verse. Both points of view fit nicely with one's empirical experience of the dialogue of renaissance verse drama of the 1590s.

**Renaissance Comments on Dramatic Verse and on Acting**

It is also useful to consider renaissance testimony on the subject. Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote plays in a blank verse that looks very much like poetry and sounds exactly like it when recited. Did they intend their dramatic speech to be melodic or actorly? After the speeches were written, they were spoken by actors. Did the actors emphasize the melody of the verse or de-emphasize it? And did the audience respond to the melody or ignore it?

In *The Poetics of Jacobean Drama* Coburn Freer argues that verse drama was valued both as poetry and as dramatic speech by Elizabethan actors and audiences. Later, when the plays were read more often than seen in the theater, the poetry began to be considered more important than the speech. The playwrights began to consider themselves “men of letters” and to write for the reading public. For Freer, poetry in the sense of melodic language is essential to the effect of English renaissance drama. Its justification is that it is functional as well as poetic. ⁸

However, many of the renaissance authors Freer cites to prove his case attack drama that is self-consciously poetic. Thomas Nashe, for
example, condemns "ideot Art-masters... who (mounted on a stage of arrogance) thinke to out-brave better pennes with the swelling bumbast of bragging blanke verse... and the spacious volubilitie of a drumming decasyllabon." 9

The word "bombast" occurs frequently in Elizabethan comments on dramatic verse. It is normally used, as here by Nashe, to criticize verse that calls attention to itself and panders to the groundlings. One of Greene's charges against Shakespeare is that he "supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you." 10 The prime exemplar of writing bombast that pleased the rabble was also the prime teacher of the art of blank verse to the later Elizabethans—Christopher Marlowe. Joseph Hall cites Tamburlaine as a notorious example of inflated verse and goes on to ridicule all attempts by dramatists to be "poetic." Their "Iambick"—i.e., dramatic—poetry delights the crowd because of its sonorous constructions ("Big-sounding sentences") and its exotic vocabulary, but it does not mean very much:

[If the author] can with termes Italianate,
Big-sounding sentences, and words of state,
Faire patch me up his pure Iambick verse,
He ravishes the gazing Scaffolders.11

As Freer observes, Hall "rejects [verse drama] altogether, emphasizing in particular the link between its emptiness of content and its sloppiness of technique." 12 One cannot say that Ben Jonson rejected verse drama. He did, however, condemn Marlovian bombast in highly specific terms:

The true Artificer will not run away from nature, as hee were afraid of her, or depart from life and the likenesse of Truth, but speake to the capacity of his hearers. And though his language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from all humanity, with the Tamerlanes and Tamer-Chams of the late Age, which had nothing in them but the scenicall strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.13

Charges of bombast and sloppy technique do not show special appreciation of the verse element in drama. Instead they show that the dramatists were scornful of inflated rhetoric. The groundlings loved this sort of thing. As Hamlet says, "O, it offends me to the soul to see a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise" (III, ii, 9–14). The dramatists regarded such "noise" as sham. The proper test
of dramatic speech is its ability to express motive—its actorly quality.

For this reason, complaints about bombast are complemented by arguments that plays are essentially action. These arguments appear first in England in Sir Philip Sidney's assertion in the Apology for Poetry that verse is "but an ornament and no cause to Poetry." 14 Nine years after the publication of the Apology, John Marston emphatically contrasts the effect of a play on the stage, where the lines have their proper meaning, with the disappointing quality of a play in printed form. The comment is in the preface to The Malcontent: "I would fain leave the paper; only one thing affects me to think that scenes invented merely [i.e., only] to be spoken, should be enforcively published to be read . . . but I shall entreat . . . that the unhandsome shape which this trifle in reading presents may be pardoned for the pleasure it afforded you when it was presented with the soul of lively action." 15 The word "soul" suggests that Marston is thinking of Aristotle's statement that the soul of drama is plot. A similar position is taken by Sir Richard Baker in Theatrum triumphans (1670) in a comment on the sources of dramatic pleasure: "A play read, hath not half the pleasure of a Play Acted...and we may well acknowledge that Gracefulness of Action is the greatest pleasure of a Play." 16

The word "action" as used by Marston and Baker may refer either to the action imitated by the plot or to the activity that occurs on stage when the play is performed. Marston seems closer to, and Baker more distant from, Aristotle. We are on solidly Aristotelian ground with the preface by John Dennis to The Comicall Gallant (1702):

As in the mixture of the Human frame,  
'Tis not the Flesh, 'tis the soul makes the Man,  
So of Dramatic Poems we may say,  
'Tis not the lines, 'tis the Plot makes the Play.  
The Soul of every Poem's the design,  
And words but serve to make that move and shine. 17

The tradition behind this comment is different from the *ars metrica* idea that poetry is language in meter, but it nicely complements the *ars metrica* theory that dramatic verse should be "biotic." In his essay The Genius and Writings of Shakespeare (1712), Dennis differentiates explicitly between the formal prosody of "Heroik Harmony" and the tone of "common Conversation" appropriate for comedy. The latter tone is suggested (in Dennis's opinion) by feminine line-endings. The reference to "Trisyllabic Terminations" seems to be an allusion to the *sdruccioli* of classicizing Italian comedy:
[Shakespeare] seems to have been the very Original of our English Tragical Harmony; that is the Harmony of Blank Verse, diversified often by Disyllabic and Trisyllabic Terminations. For that Diversity distinguishes it from Heroick Harmony, and bringing it nearer to common Use, makes it more proper to gain Attention, and more fit for Action and Dialogue. Such Verse we make when we are writing prose; we make such Verse in common Conversation.  

The second aspect of the effort to understand renaissance attitudes toward the style of dramatic verse is the way the verse was spoken by actors. Were lines delivered in an artificial manner emphasizing their difference from ordinary language—that is, as recitation—or was the delivery closer to what would be called naturalism today?  

We have already noticed John Brinsley’s statement in *Ludus literarius* about the right way to read Latin poetry: “So in all Poetry, for the pronunciation, it is to be uttered as prose; observing distinctions and the nature of the matter; not to be tuned foolishly or childishly after the manner of scanning a Verse, as the use of some is.” As if to relate what he is saying to drama, Brinsley adds that students should memorize Vergil’s eclogues so they can recite them as dialogue, with proper emphasis on motive and emotion, rather than as verse. In suggesting that verse should be read as prose “observing distinctions and the nature of the matter,” he is urging that the verse be spoken in an actorly way.  

The advice accords nicely with Hamlet’s advice to the players (III, ii, 1–45) to speak the lines “trippingly on the tongue” and to refrain from tearing a passion “to tatters, to very rags”—that is, ranting. Action should be suited to the word and the word to the action. “Action” apparently means stage gesture to Hamlet, so that the advice can be paraphrased: “Suit gesture to statement and statement to gesture.”  

Thomas Heywood amplifies Hamlet’s advice in his *Apology for Actors* (1612). Rhetoric, he says, should teach the actor “to fit his phrases to his action and his action to his phrases, and his pronunciation to them both.” In this comment “phrases” means something like “the words in the script.” The phrases imply certain gestures, and, as in Hamlet’s advice, the two should be complementary. “Pronunciation” means “delivery” (*pronunciatio*). It carries with it the idea of making clear by voice inflections—that is, vocal enactment—the motives and emotions that are the causes of the words.  

Currently, the standard review of the evidence about English renaissance acting is that undertaken by Bertram Joseph in *Elizabethan Acting*. Joseph concludes in the 1951 edition of his book that Elizabe-
than acting followed formulas given in classical rhetoric for delivery of orations. The stylization extended to language. Joseph suggests that the speaking style of the actors may have been like the *stile recitativo* of Italian opera. It follows that "the naturalistic conception of drama" has no relevance to the Elizabethan stage.  

However, in the second edition of *Elizabethan Acting* (1964), Joseph had second thoughts. The references to stile recitativo and opera have been dropped. The thrust of the second edition is summed up in a word that was explicitly banished from the first edition—"naturalness":

As the Elizabethan actor responded to variations in the style of his lines, so the style of the performance varied. Rhythm, tempo of speech and movement, and melody of speech would have been affected by stylistic variations, but there would still have remained untouched the essential naturalness of behavior, which was that of such a person communicating what was within him in the circumstances of acting.

The description is all the more persuasive because it requires a reversal of Joseph's earlier position.

The dominant Elizabethan acting style, then, was probably natural. Some actors were doubtless flamboyant, inclined, perhaps, to stile recitativo. Most were natural. Shakespeare and Ben Jonson stress words like "modesty" and "nature" when discussing acting. We can conclude with Richard Flecknoe's famous description of Richard Burbage. The description shows that Burbage aimed at "naturalness" and that his method was to identify closely with the character being portrayed:

*Burbidge,* of whom we may say that he was a delightful Proteus, so wholly transforming himself into his Part, and putting himself off with his Cloathes, as he never (not so much as in the Tyring-house) assm’d himself again until the Play was done; there being as much difference betwixt him and one of our common Actors, as between a Ballad-singer who onely mouths it, and an excellent singer, who knows all his Graces, and can artfully vary and modulate his Voice, even to know how much breath he is to give to every syllable. He had all the parts of an excellent Orator, animating his words with speaking, and Speech with Action; his Auditors being never more delighted then when he spake, nor more sorry then when he held his peace; yet even then he was an excellent Actor still, never falling in his Part when he had done speaking, but with his looks and gesture maintaining it still unto the heighth, he imagining *Age quod agis* onely spoke to him: so as those who call him a Player do him wrong, no man being less idle then he whose whole life is nothing else but action;
with only this difference from other mens, that what is but a Play to them is his Business, so their business is but a play to him.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{M A R L O W E’ S M I G H T Y L I N E}

Christopher Marlowe burst onto the London theater scene with the force of an explosion around 1587. \textit{Tamburlaine} was the sort of success that transforms the theater. Prominent among Marlowe’s achievements is what Ben Jonson rightly called his “mighty line.” The mighty line is driving in rhythm, loose in syntactical structure, and divided into well-defined phrase and clause units. These are often emphasized by end-stopped lines, but Marlowe is also capable of enjambment and units that approximate verse paragraphs.\textsuperscript{24} It is ornamented with exotic terms and polysyllables, and its sound is often at least as important as its sense. It encourages speeches that are there simply because they sound grand. Led by Edward Alleyn, who made the role of Tamburlaine famous, the actors took full advantage of the mighty line. It was new, sensational, and above all, popular. The preface to \textit{Tamburlaine} shows that Marlowe was aware of its power:

\begin{quote}
From jygging vaines of riming mother wits,  
And such conceits as clownage keepes in pay,  
Weele leade you to the stately tent of War,  
Where you shall heare the Scythian \textit{Tamburlaine},  
Threatning the world with high astounding tearms.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Marlowe’s terms “stately” and “high astounding” show he thought of his verse as heroic. As Eugene Waith observes in \textit{The Herculean Hero}, Tamburlaine has qualities that relate him to the Hercules of Seneca’s \textit{Hercules Oetaeus} and other well-known titanic and heroic figures.\textsuperscript{26} On the other hand, current criticism of Marlowe has demonstrated that he had a lively sense of stage action. In spite of its flamboyance, the mighty line is often impressively well suited to performance.\textsuperscript{27}

The fact is that the verse of \textit{Tamburlaine} illustrates nicely two points regularly made about tragic verse in the \textit{ars metrica}. It has heroic qualities, and its verse often sounds like epic verse when recited. At the same time, it is written for performance, and whatever its deviations, its norm is speech.

In book 4 of the \textit{Aeneid}, Aeneas must choose between remaining in Carthage with Dido and following his destiny to Italy. He is torn be-
tween the alternatives but finally decides to leave. When Dido hears of his decision she rebukes him. She is a familiar literary figure—a woman scorned. In composing her speech Vergil moved away from the epic norm and toward the colloquial. Surrey's translation reproduces this tone:

To Italy passe on by helpe of wyndes,
And through the flouds go searche thy kingdome newe,
If ruthfull Gods have any power, I trust
Amyd the rockes thy hyre thou shalt fynde
When thou shalt cleape ful oft on Didoes name,
Wyth buryal brandes I absent shaull thee chase
And when cold death from lyf these lymbes divydes,
My gost shall styl upon thee wayte,
Thou shalt abye and I shall here thereof.
Among the soules below this brute shall come. 28

The passage has a moderately illocutionary quality. It is divided into three units: a hortatory sentence (ll. 1–2), a conditional sentence (ll. 3–5), and four threats (ll. 6, 7–8, 9, 10). The flow of the verse is continuous within the units. The second unit (ll. 3–5) is enjambed. Otherwise, a regular rhythm is created by pauses at the end of the lines, with stronger pauses at the line ends that mark transitions from one unit to the next. The construction produces natural rather than artificial order, and generally short sense units. The vocabulary is standard and consists mostly of monosyllables. Line 8 is defective. Since the lack of two syllables does not seem to be expressive, perhaps the defect is the result of a printer’s error. This problem aside, the passage is considerably smoother than the translation by Surrey of Vergil’s description of Dido’s death. The moment is less critical and calls for less in the way of poetic artifice. The result is effective as narrative but lacks actorly potential. This is hardly surprising; the lines are written for reading.

Marlowe’s version of the episode in Dido, Queene of Carthage (V, i, 169–78) is as follows:

Goe goe and spare not, seeke out Italy,
I hope that that which love forbids me doe,
The Rockes and Sea-gulfes will performe at large,
And thou shalt perish in the billowes waies,
To whome poor Dido doth bequeath revenge.
I traitor, and the waves shall cast thee up,
Where thou and false Achates first set foot:
Which, if it chaunce, Ile give ye burial,
And weep upon your liveles carcases,
Though thou nor he will pitie me a white.²⁹

This passage is quite different in quality from Surrey's. Its actorly quality is announced by two features of the first line. It begins with a strongly illocutionary form—an imperative. The repetition of “goe” encourages the actor's voice to fill the two words with intense emotion. But what emotion? The question requires an investigation into the causes of the words. Perhaps the first “goe” is said softly, suggesting the inclination of the lover to wish the beloved well. The second “goe” is then said loudly and bitterly, indicating Dido's rising anger over Aeneas's treachery. Since the line is actorly, this is only one possible objectification of it.

The second actorly element in the first line is the heavy pause after “spare not.” The pause invites speculation about what Dido is doing while she speaks. Does she raise her hand at the pause to point in the direction of Italy? Does she shrug hopelessly? Does she pause and then almost scream “SEEK OUT ITALY”? What is Aeneas doing? Is he embarrassed? Does he turn away? Look at the ground? Attempt to console her by touching her? There are no definitive answers to these questions. The point is that the line invites the questions. It is written with a sense of spectacle—of opsis; that is, of characters physically confronting each other and interacting, even though one of the characters is for the moment silent.

Marlowe has “visualized” the action. He has also utilized strong illocutionary forms. The line consists of three commands: “goe,” “spare not,” and “seeke out.” Finally, the strong pause after “spare not” is nicely adjusted to the actor's breathing rhythm. Pauses for breathing are an aspect of Marlowe's verse seldom noted explicitly. Although there are passages in Dido that can leave an actor breathless, most of the speeches have regular pauses that allow easy breathing. In this respect Marlowe's verse recalls the verse of Gorboduc and may demand less of the actor, generally, than the verse of the early Shakespeare.

The next four lines are both Marlovian and closer to Surrey than the first line. They must be recited in pairs separated by the conjunction ("and") at the beginning of the second pair. They are not quite like Surrey, however, because their word order is simpler and thus easier to make clear when spoken.

A strong actorly quality returns in the next-to-last line. Dido pauses, draws herself up, and emphasizes the scornful curse that is to
follow with “I” ("aye") followed by a pause, followed, in turn, by "traitor," a word expressing hatred and outrage. Perhaps she is weeping as she uses the word. Perhaps she says it softly rather than harshly. Again, the line invites the actor to explore its possible causes. And, of course, like the first line in the quotation, it implies interaction between Dido and the unspeaking Aeneas. Perhaps as she says "traitor," she points accusingly and looks directly into his eyes. Perhaps he flinches. The specifics are not as important as the invitation to explore them.

Lucan’s *Pharsalia* is an epic about the Roman civil wars written in the first century A.D. Marlowe probably translated it while a student at Cambridge, but there is no way of knowing. The work was published in 1600, seven years after his death. He may have been working on it in the early 1590s. It is, at any rate, explicitly heroic. Marlowe decided to translate it in blank verse, making him only the second poet of the English Renaissance to use that form for a sustained heroic narrative. Since there is no reason to believe he was aware of Surrey’s *Aeneid*, it is interesting to observe how many of the strategies that appear for the first time in Surrey reappear in Marlowe’s Lucan. The two authors are not only translating from Latin, they are also imitating in the sense of reaching for the effects of their originals. Evidently they arrive independently at similar conclusions.

The *Pharsalia* begins with an expository passage, followed by the lines that begin the action:

30

Caesars and Pompets jarring love soone ended,
T’was peace against their wils; betwixt them both
Stept Crassus in: even as the slender Isthmos
Betwixt the Agean and the Ionian sea,
Keepes each from other, but being wore away
They both burst out, and each incounter other:
So when as Crassus wretched death who stayd them,
Had fild Assirian Carras wals with bloud,
His losse made way for Roman outrages.

(ll. 98–106)

This verse is less musical than the verse of Surrey’s *Aeneid*. The harsh effect is probably intentional. Lucan is less musical than Vergil. He is describing the ugly death throes of a culture, not its noble beginnings. Given this fact, Marlowe’s translation is nicely expressive of its source. It is filled with heroic *enargia*, complex constructions, “rough” sound, and ornamental words, and it is larger than life.
The passage begins with two short units that would have actorly potential if used in a passage of dramatic exposition. However, even these passages are Latinate rather than English and are therefore distanced from speech. The first line is an English version of a Latin ablative absolute, with the verb ("ended") used as a participle. Idiomatic English either would treat the line as a complete sentence and the verb as finite or would use a subordinating conjunction and a finite verb, as, for example, "Since Caesar's and Pompey's love soon ended..." The second unit uses inversion and ends with a preposition. The normal English order would be subject, verb, and adverbial modifier, as, for example, "Crassus stepped in between them both." The inversion here is well within the bounds of what can be spoken and used to good effect by the voice, but it distances the sentence from speech. The dependence of the ablative absolute (l. 1) on the main clause (l. 2) and the enjambment between the second and third lines hurries the verse along in spite of the pause at the sentence boundary. The units are short, but the form announces its capacity to create large, sustained units.

Just such a unit follows. The unit begins with "betwixt" and continues to the end of the passage quoted. It is an epic simile comparing a natural phenomenon—the separation of the Aegean and Ionian seas by the isthmus of Corinth—with the separation of two great antagonists by Crassus. The need to complete the comparison begun with the phrase "even as" sustains the verse for seven lines. The effect is reinforced by syntax. The first half of the simile is not completed until the final, climactic line: "They...burst out, and each incounter[s] [the] other." The second half of the simile is likewise withheld until the final line: "[When as Crassus...filed...Carras wals]...His losse made way..."

The simile is impressive, and it is obviously heroic. Although the first three lines of the passage could be made into dramatic exposition, the seven lines of the simile are clearly intended for reading. They would be as difficult as Jasper Heywood's Latinate fourteeners to speak effectively on stage. This is proper. Marlowe understands the nature of heroic verse and quite effectively objectifies it in his lines.

Two additional effects may be mentioned. Ellipsis accounts for the omission of "the" in "each incounter other." The use of ornamental words is also apparent. Here they are place names, italicized to make them stand out: Agean, Ionia, Assirian Carras. These devices complement the effect of the syntax in distancing the verse from speech.31
Tamburlaine is the most sonorous of Marlowe’s plays and also the one that comes closest to epic. In fact, it seems more epic than most other serious plays in blank verse because its intensity is sustained. The result is often grand but becomes, after a time, predictable. This is the play’s greatest fault if compared with another play that makes an explicit bid for epic elevation—Shakespeare’s Henry V. In Shakespeare’s play the moments of epic intensity are brilliantly alternated with scenes devoted to the practical affairs of state and comic horse-play. Henry is given to ringing speeches, but he also has a long passage in prose when he walks disguised among his troops on the night before Agincourt.

In spite of the one-dimensional quality of Tamburlaine, the groundlings were transported by its verse, and well they might have been. Nothing quite like the mighty line had been heard before on the English stage. At times—and these times are easy to identify—the mighty line is more sound than content. In the very first scene of Tamburlaine, for example, Marlowe pulls out the stops in a speech by Ortygius:

And in assurance of desir’d successe,
We here doo crowne thee Monarch of the East,
Emperour of Asia, and of Persea,
Great Lord of Medea and Armenia:
Duke of Assiria and Albania,
Mesopotamia and of Parthia,
East India and the late discovered Isles,
Chiefe Lord of all the wide vast Euxine sea...  

These lines can hardly be considered speech. They amount to a list of ornamental words. They ask to be recited, like lines from an epic, and recitation is undoubtedly the proper way to deliver them. In addition to exotic vocabulary and strong assonance, five of the eight lines use elisions at the caesuras that contrast with nonelided double vowels with stress on the second vowel at the ends of four of the lines. Presumably, the elisions are invoked for syllable count but not pronounced. Clearly, Marlowe is enjoying language-play here, and just as clearly, because the language is making its own music, the actorly quality is diminished. As John Russell Brown, otherwise a defender of Marlowe’s dramatic sense, remarks, “The most obvious demand that Marlowe makes upon his actors is to speak grandiloquent poetry.”  

There is another side to the coin. Even the Ortygius speech is di-
vided into a series of short grammatical units that make it easy to recite, and to that extent it is adapted to stage performance.

Often Marlowe's line has strong actorly qualities. Here, for example, is a famous moment in the play—Tamburlaine's grandiloquent self-justification in act 1. He has just captured a convoy transporting Zenocrate, daughter of the sultan of Egypt, to the prince of Araby. Smitten with love for her, he asks whether she is betrothed. She replies, and he answers:

Zen.: I am (my Lord) for so you do import.
Tam.: I am a Lord, for so my deeds shall proove,
    And yet a shepheard by my Parentage:
    But Lady, this fair face and heavenly hew,
    Must grace the bed that conquers Asia:
    And meanes to be a terrour to the world,
    Measuring the limits of his Emperie
    By East and west, as Phoebus doth his course:
    Lie here ye weedes, that I disdaine to weare,
    This compleat armor, and this curtle-axe
    Are adjuncts more beseeming Tamburlaine.34

The lines are typical of the elevated verse of the play as a whole. They seem to be epic. The rhythm is pronounced and powerful. The vocabulary is ornamented with polysyllables and strange words (“Parentage,” “Emperie,” “Phoebus”).

However, if this passage is contrasted with the passage from Pharsalia—or even with the speech just quoted from scene 1—significant differences emerge. In the first place, in spite of the sprinkling of ornamental words, the vocabulary is pretty much standard, and there are no obtrusive language games going on in the versification. The word order in Pharsalia is generally artificial; here it is natural and the sentence structure is loose. Like normal English conversation, Tamburlaine's announcement moves forward by addition of later elements to earlier ones (parataxis): “I am a Lord . . . and yet a shepheard”; “the bed that conquers . . . and meanes.” The natural syntax is complemented by a prosody that is simple in comparison with the prosody of the Tamburlaine passage quoted earlier.

If understood as accentual meter, Tamburlaine's speech seems to begin with an inversion. The word “I” seems to ask for stress in the first line. If this intonation is accepted, it has the effect of making “I” especially prominent and thus suggesting that the cause of the speech is the egotism of the speaker. This is appropriate and actorly. How-
ever, for other reasons—also actorly—to be discussed shortly, the stress is probably on "am."

In general the key words in these lines have what Halle and Keyser call stress maximum,\(^3\) for example, "Lord", "shep-[heard]", "La­[dy]", "grace," con-[quers],” "Mea-[suring]," and "Em-[perie]." Syl­lable count is observed; syncope is used twice ("heavenly," "measur­ing"). "Compleat" (l. 10) creates problems in an accentual scansion but none if one understands the lines as syllabic verse. Coordination of prosody with syntax is evident in the coincidence of caesuras with phrase boundaries and the tendency of the lines to be stopped by punctuation. These strategies aid the speaking voice as it attempts to delimit segments of meaning for auditors. Other syllabic qualities are evident in the recurrence of lyric caesura (ll. 3, 4, 7, 10, 11), in the irregularity of many lines if judged in terms of accentual meter (ll. 4, 7, 10), and in the tendency of a syntactical rhythm of from two to four heavy accents per line to predominate. Of special interest is the alter­nation of trisyllabic end-words with a promoted last syllable (ll. 3, 5, 7, 11) with monosyllables (ll. 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10), a strategy recalling the French fondness for alternation of terminal rhyme forms.

Coincidence of pauses with phrase boundaries and lack of complex periodic structure make the lines easy to speak in a way that is clear to an audience. However, the regularity works against the actorly quality of the lines by encouraging the actor to recite rather than speak. When recited (rather than spoken), the verse sounds like heroic verse, even though it is different in structure and technique from Marlowe’s heroic verse. Undoubtedly actors recited it and audiences responded to the recitation with enthusiasm. It is simplification of speech, a first effort rather than a fully developed dramatic medium. This is how Marlowe himself must have understood it, because after the second part of Tamburlaine—and in spite of the popularity of the mighty line—his dia­logue became more like speech.

Even in the passage quoted, however, there are striking actorly ef­fects. In writing it, Marlowe practiced visualization. It assumes a stage filled with Tamburlaine’s henchmen in exotic dress and flushed with their victory over Zenocrate’s convoy. The spoils of the convoy are displayed on the stage. The two dominant figures are Tamburlaine and Zenocrate. The henchmen crowd around as their leader speaks. They certainly gesture; probably they also murmur approval from time to time. The speech is astonishingly bold. It is an invitation to Zenocrate to become Tamburlaine’s empress. Zenocrate is dressed in the finery of an Oriental princess. Tamburlaine is dressed meanly. When Zenoc-
rate first sees him, she exclaims, “Ah Shepheard, pity my distressed plight, / (If as thou seem’st, thou art so meane a man).”

When he asks whether she is betrothed, she replies, “I am (my Lord).” He repeats the words: “I am a Lord.” The repetition depends for its effect on interaction between the two speakers. It also suggests how the words “I am” should be stressed. The stress should fall on “am” because the statement is affirmative. This intonation assumes (and projects) a specific set of causes for the exchange. Zenocrate has used the term “my Lord” in spite of the fact that her captor is not much more than an outlaw and his lowly status is evident from his dress. She is trying to ingratiate herself. Tamburlaine interprets her reply literally. The stress on “am” conveys a meaning something like “Yes, you are right. I am, indeed, a Lord, even though I may not look like one.” The next clause completes the idea: “I will soon prove so by my deeds.”

Tamburlaine’s first two lines are spoken in a defiant manner. But he wishes to marry Zenocrate. The next two lines are therefore gentler. Perhaps he stops, gazes at her admiringly, and touches her dress. Whatever he does, a change of some sort is announced by his use of a disjunction (“But”) followed by direct address: “But Lady. . . .” Now he outlines his plans. His lines are ornamented by hyperbole, but they are not complex. Because the sentence structure is loose, they move ahead in simple units with regular pauses for breathing.

The speech turns again when Tamburlaine comments on his costume. Perhaps while he speaks, he continues to touch Zenocrate’s splendid gown. At any rate, he suddenly says, “Lie here ye weeds” and throws his shepherd’s robe to the ground. In the next line he evidently displays “this compleat armor, and this curtle-axe.” Where do they come from? Either he has been wearing them under the shepherd’s robe or he has picked them from the booty of the convoy. If the latter, he begins to put them on as he speaks. Probably when he says his name again, he is fully dressed in a warrior’s costume.

The dialogue is actorly in the fullest sense of the word. However it is worked out, it requires the creation of several causes to be intelligible. The causes include prior speech (Zenocrate’s “I am [my Lord]”), costume (the shepherd’s robe; the base appearance of the entire band), character (egotism, love), gestures (pointing), participation of nonspeaking characters (the henchmen), stage props (the booty), and activity (changing costume). Note that the causes arise from the level of praxis—the interplay of event and motive. They must be deduced from the script, but in performance, the speeches seem to be
their effects, not their source. At least in this passage, the text is truly oriented toward its performance.

Additional actorly features can easily be imagined. Zenocrate cannot stand woodenly by while Tamburlaine makes the amazing announcement that she is to “grace [his] bed.” How should she react? Does Tamburlaine wait until the words “Lie here . . .” to take off the shepherd’s robe, or does he begin to disrobe early in the speech, using the removal of his robes as a cause of interruptions in the speech? The questions need not be answered here. The speech suggests all of them and requires that several be answered by anyone who plans to stage the scene.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Marlowe’s meteoric dramatic career is the rapidity with which he moved away from the quasi-heroic speech of Tamburlaine.37 “Marlovian” passages can be found in all of his plays, but they become less frequent. Emphasis changes from grandiloquent language to complex action in Edward II (1591), The Jew of Malta, and The Massacre at Paris (both 1591–92?). As the action becomes more complex, the dialogue becomes less ornamental. If current theories of dating are correct, Marlowe had already moved decisively toward dramatic speech by the writing of Doctor Faustus (1588–89). In fact, the final soliloquy in Faustus is probably Marlowe’s supreme dramatic achievement. It is, by the same token, his least “Marlovian” and most actorly extended speech. It goes in and out of blank verse. When it is spoken in an actorly manner, the verse rhythms all but disappear.

The speech requires intensive study by the actor of physical gesture and blocking. A few props would be useful: a painting of the Crucifixion, an astrolabe, several heavy books, a glass of water. The words should be spoken slowly—how slowly?—with frequent gestures. The speech is brilliantly punctuated by the striking of the clock. At the end there is thunder, and devils appear. Do they come from a hell-mouth? Although they have no stage directions, they are active. The “Schollers” who enter Faustus’s study after his death find his limbs “torn assunder” and “mangled.” Although his speech does not reveal this fact, the scene must end with a horrible visual effect: dismemberment. Does it occur onstage? The “Schollers” also speak of hearing shrieks. Presumably while the dismemberment is happening Faustus is screaming in agony. Do the screams begin with Faustus’s speech, “My God, my God . . .”? Or are they symbolized by the single innocent-looking “ah” in the last line? Or are they to be improvised? The text allows any of these enactments.
One is tempted to discuss the actorly qualities of the speech in detail. If the preceding analysis has been effective, however, they will be evident without further discussion:

The Stars move still, Time runs, the Clocke will strike,
The devill will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
O, I'le leape up to my God: who puls me downe?
See see where Christs bloud streames in the firmament,
One drop would save my soule, halfe a drop, ah my Christ.
Rend not my heart, for naming of my Christ,
Yet will I call on him: O spare me Lucifer.
Where is it now? 'tis gone. And see where God
Stretcheth out his Arme, and bends his irefull Browes. . . .

[The Watch strikes]

Ah, halfe the houre is past: 'twill all be past anone:
O God. . . .
Ah Pythagoras Metemsycosis; were that true,
This soule should flie from me, and I be chang'd
Unto some brutish beast. . . .

[ The clocke striketh twelve.]

It strikes, it strikes; now, body, turne to aire,
Or Lucifer will beare thee quicke to hell.
O soule be chang'd into little water drops,
And fall into the Ocean, ne're be found.

[Thunder and enter the devils]

My God, my God, looke not so fierce on me;
Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while:
Ugly hell gape not; come not, Lucifer,
I'le burne my bookes; ah Mephistophilis.  

[Exeunt with him]

KYD AND SHAKESPEARE

The blank verse of The Spanish Tragedy (1586?) has been overshad­owed by the mighty line of Tamburlaine. It is different in kind, and the difference is instructive. The ghost of Andrea, who opens the play, has stepped directly out of Seneca, and the language used in the ghost's soliloquy is reminiscent of the soliloquy of Tantalus on the horrors of hell that begins Seneca's Thyestes:

The left hand path, declining fearfully,
Was ready downfall to the deepest hell,
Where bloudie furies shake their whips of steele,
And poore Ixion turnes an endles wheele;
Where usurers are choak't with melting golde,
And wantons are imbraste with ouglie Snakes,
And murderers grone with never killing wounds. 39

Seneca (and Jasper Heywood) provide a modicum of actorly ten-
sion for the first speech of Tantalus in Thyestes by having the Fury
Megaera drive him on stage and then menace him with her whips and
serpents while he speaks. Kyd's stage directions call for "Revenge" to
accompany Andrea's ghost, but no use is made of the character, and
its presence is irrelevant. Andrea's opening soliloquy is exposition
pure and simple. The syntax is also simple. Kyd will have none of
Heywood's Latinate strategies. Probably this reflects the fact that Kyd
wrote for the stage. His verse is direct, easily spoken, and easily
understood. Its spectacular effects come from imagery and allusion.
Rhythmically, it is a somewhat improved version of the verse of Gor-
boduc.

Kyd also makes frequent use of rapid give-and-take dialogue with
ritualistic qualities underscored by repetition, parallelism, and related
figures. The following exchange is typical. It is formal, but an actorly
quality is introduced by the fact that Balthazar and Lorenzo are eaves-
dropping and make brutal comments that are inaudible to Horatio and
Bel-Imperia:

Bel-

Imperia: Why stands Horatio speechles all this while?
Horatio: The lesse I speak, the more I meditate.
   Bel.: But whereon doost thou chiefly meditate?
   Hor.: On dangers past, and pleasures to ensue.
Balthazar: On pleasures past, and dangers to ensue.
   Bel.: What dangers and what pleasures doost thou mean?
   Hor.: Dangers of warre, and pleasures of our love.
Lorenzo: Dangers of death, but pleasures none at all.
   Bel: Let dangers goe, thy warre shall be with me. . . . 40

The exchange obviously does not imitate Seneca's use of aphorisms,
but its rhetoric makes it into a verbal ballet much like Seneca's give-
and-take dialogue, heavily dependent on parallelism, antithesis, and
word repetition at the beginning of clauses (anaphora). One can imag-
ine an actorly performance of the lines, but it would be working
against their style. The chief actorly element is the powerful dramatic
irony, quite Senecan in flavor, created by the comments of Balthazar
and Lorenzo. The lovers are doomed even as they confess their love.
The passage recalls Thyestes attempting to enjoy his banquet even

252 / PERFORMANCES
while the audience (or auditors) understands that his children have been murdered and he is eating their flesh.

When Kyd moves from dialogue to formal lament, the regularity of the rhythm, the end-stopping of the lines, and the use of exclamation, repetition, and parallelism recall *Gorboduc*:

> O eis, no eis but fountains fraught with tears;
> O life, no life but lively fourme of death;
> O world, no world, but masse of publique wrongs,
> Confusde and filde with murder and misdeeds.
> O sacred heavens if this unhallowed deed,
> If this inhumane and barberous attempt,
> If this incomparable murder thus
> Of mine, but now no more my sonne,
> Shall unreveald and unrevenged passe,
> How should we tearme your dealings to be just,
> If you unjustly deale with those, that in your justice trust.⁴¹

Even this passage is not, however, without interest. Its multiple figures of diction and its syntax are neatly coordinated to the line unit (all but one line end with punctuation). The whole is topped off with a fourteen-syllable line linked to its decasyllabic predecessor by rhyme.

In one important respect, Kyd rejects the lesson provided by Sackville and Norton. The longer speeches in *Gorboduc* are formal orations. Kyd has many soliloquies, laments, descriptions, and the like, but his verse is not “speech” in the sense of being oratory. Its virtue is that it is a means rather than an end.

The norms of dramatic speech are determined by the ability of an audience to understand it when it is spoken by actors. This ability is extremely variable. Drama is a code, and as long as the code is shared by actors and audience, almost any stylistic norm, from kabuki to Stanislavski, will work. Opera and musical comedy show how liberal the code can be for the modern theater.

In the 1560s the code included fourteeners. They were accepted as an adequate representation of natural speech. By 1590 the code had changed. Blank verse had become standard, and Kyd and Marlowe define the two paths blank verse could take. Presumably Kyd employs it because it is closer to speech than the fourteener. His verse is often ornamental, but its thrust is toward becoming a medium for dialogue. In *Tamburlaine* Marlowe defines an alternative—a verse that creates excitement because it is verse. Quite often, the verse of *Tamburlaine* is
as actorly as the verse of The Spanish Tragedy. It is, however, oriented in a direction that points away from drama rather than toward it, and Marlowe himself adopted a different style after the second part of Tamburlaine.

The distinction between the two styles is significant for Shakespeare. It used to be assumed that Edward II preceded the Henry VI plays and that Marlowe popularized the history play. Today there is agreement that the Henry VI plays were probably written before Edward II and that Shakespeare may have been the prime influence in popularizing historical drama. As F. P. Wilson remarked in a review of the subject in 1953, “My conclusion is, though I am frightened at my own temerity in saying so, that for all we know there were no popular plays on English history before the Armada and that Shakespeare may have been the first to write one.”

This does not mean Shakespeare learned nothing from Marlowe—he obviously learned a great deal. It merely means lines of influence are more complicated than they once appeared to be.

The early Shakespeare is fully as mesmerized by the delights of language as the Marlowe of Tamburlaine. If Wilson is correct, he was more fascinated than Marlowe with rhetorical figures and word games. Moreover, the early plays abound in rhymed verse (e.g., A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Romeo and Juliet), in set speeches using formal rhetorical patterns (Richard III), in lurid Ovidian and Senecan descriptions (Titus Andronicus), in laments (Richard III, Richard II), and in passages where the poetry is as noticeable as the action being presented (Richard II).

Shakespeare gradually lost interest in showy poetry. In the mature plays the norm is closer to natural speech. It is because this norm is so clearly established that the moments when the norm is transcended are so impressive. In Hamlet Shakespeare calls attention to the dialogue norm by writing passages that contrast strikingly with it. The “play within the play” is shown by its dumb show to be archaic. Accordingly, it is written in stiff decasyllabic couplets, which are probably as close as Shakespeare dared come to the fourteener of the older drama except in overtly comic episodes like the performance of Pyramus and Thisby in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The player’s speech about the death of Priam and Hecuba is another matter. It is old-fashioned but not archaic. It is written in a regular, end-stopped blank verse with artificial constructions a little reminiscent of Surrey’s Aeneid. Both the “play within the play” and the player’s speech stand out because they are so noticeably different from the Hamlet norm.
The language of Shakespeare's mature drama is neither poetic nor prosy. It is written with a deep sense of the way it will be used by the actors who perform it. That is to say, it is written with an understanding, sharpened by years of involvement in the theater, of the causes that give rise to it. It reveals an awareness that it will not be recited but will be modulated by specific voice patterns of stress, pitch, duration, rhythm, gradation, and silence, and will be given causes by gesture, body orientation, character interaction, stage props, costume, and the like. It is wonderfully plastic. It invites explorations of its causes without imposing a solution on the actor.

No one would deny that Shakespeare wrote supremely beautiful and melodic passages. Obviously he did. In the mature plays these passages coincide with significant dramatic moments, often of great emotional intensity, like the moment when Perdita is named queen of the sheep-shearing festival in *The Winter's Tale* or the moment when Prospero abandons his magic in *The Tempest*. Even normally prosy characters like Enobarbus and Caliban can rise to exquisite poetry when deeply moved. The melody, in other words, is, in this case, an objectification of elements inherent in the action of the play and not ornamental. A fine example is provided by what G. Wilson Knight first called “the Othello music.” The musicality of Othello's speech at the beginning of the play is correlative to the harmonies of his soul; the disintegration of the melody in the later acts is correlative to the “chaos” that descends on him when he begins to suspect Desdemona.

Sometimes the Shakespearean actor has the option of stressing or suppressing verbal melody according to his or her interpretation of the character. For example, Macbeth’s “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” can be richly and darkly musical, or it can be fragmented and devoid of melody—an objectification of the emptiness of despair. Sometimes Shakespeare's speeches seem intentionally lacking in melody. “To be or not to be” asks the audience to share in a reasoning process. The meaning constitutes the poetry, and the verse is almost transparent. And sometimes, of course, the verse is swallowed by tumultuous events. Antony’s “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears” is not spoken as a continuous line. The first word is shouted to a noisy and disrespectful crowd. It is answered by more noise, so after a pause Antony tries again. Perhaps things settle down a little, but another pause and another appeal is necessary. Then, after another pause, the final appeal is made. Probably by this time, the crowd is mostly silent, although one can imagine a few jeers and cat-calls even when Antony has begun the oration proper.
Whether melody is emphasized or suppressed, the primary emphasis of Shakespeare's mature dialogue is on actorly qualities that become evident only when it is considered in relation to performance. In this sense it is "like speech" and also "like prose." Its success depends on its construction. A Shakespearean prosody must recognize this fact. If it seeks a basis in tradition, the phrase orientation of romance prosody is a good beginning, but it is only a beginning. Shakespeare and his contemporaries had learned far more about dramatic verse from writing it than is dreamed of in the treatises of second rhetoric and the theories of dramatic verse of the Italian Cinquecento.

**Verse and Memory**

A final question. If renaissance dramatists valued blank verse because of its conversational quality, why were they reluctant to use prose? Dramatic dialogue begins in England with the chanted dialogue of Latin liturgical drama. It changes into complex rhyming stanzas in the Corpus Christi plays, and into cantilevered verse and fourteeners in the mid-sixteenth century. Cantilevered verse gives way to prose for comedy beginning with George Gascoigne's *Supposes* (1567) and fourteeners to blank verse for tragedy beginning with *Gorboduc* (1561). By the 1590s prose is being used for history plays along with blank verse, and it alternates with blank verse in Shakespeare's histories.

There, however, the movement toward simplification of the medium of dramatic speech stops. In the seventeenth century, in fact, the movement is reversed. Seventeenth-century playwrights begin writing for readers as much as for performance. When they do so, they write verse that reads well, whether or not it has actorly qualities. During the Restoration, a new set of conditions resulted in the use of heroic couplets for serious drama. Heroic plays died a merciful death before the end of the seventeenth century. Nathaniel Lee's *Rival Queens*, in blank verse, appeared in March 1677, and Dryden's *All for Love* a few months later, but the first English tragedy in prose—George Lillo's *London Merchant*—was not written until 1731. Not until the later nineteenth century did prose become the preferred vehicle for serious drama.

The shift from chanted dialogue to prose is part of a larger movement. It is a movement from ritual to naturalistic expression. Verse and stylized acting are signs that the English theatre continued to be influenced, at least until the 1590s, by the ritual traditions of medieval
drama. Between Tamburlaine and the first decade of the seventeenth century there seems to have been a move toward naturalism. The naturalistic tendency was encouraged by the Aristotelian definition of poetry as the imitation of an action, rather than as language shaped into verse. Some of the naturalistic bias comes out in the criticism that we have already reviewed of “bombast” in dramatic dialogue. On the other hand, the naturalistic bias remained tentative. The continuing use of verse for upper-class characters and prose for lower-class characters, and the continued presence of explicitly lyrical passages in Shakespeare and the Jacobean dramatists show that the older tradition continued to be influential long after the conditions that created it had ceased to be operative.

Renaissance dramatists, however, probably had a practical as well as an aesthetic reason for retaining blank verse. A recurrent explanation of the value of verse from the Greeks to Wordsworth’s “Preface” to Lyrical Ballads is that it is easy to memorize. The explanation is correct. Verse is easier to memorize than prose. The point has relevance for drama. Renaissance actors had to commit a staggering number of lines to memory. Not only did they frequently play double or triple roles in a single play, they had to perform in more than one play in the course of a single week.

The actors must have needed all the aids to memory they could get. If, by 1600, the norm for acting was speech rather than recitation, one significant motive for retaining verse must have been that it is easier to memorize than prose. It follows that actors share responsibility with the dramatic tradition, the bombast-loving groundlings, and readers of play quartos for the retention of blank verse in serious drama until the closing of the theatres in 1642. Blank verse survived at least partly because it is easy to memorize and provides a ready basis for faking when memory falters.