Measuring Performances

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Variations sur la lettre, le mètre et la mesure

Shakespeare

textes présentés par Dominique Goy-Blanquet

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accentuées et des syllabes inaccentuées, ou, pour s'exprimer autrement, par leur position les unes par rapport aux autres. Il n'est jamais question, sous la plume de ces auteurs, de la longueur des phrases, de la segmentation du discours en tranches mesurées à l'avance. Cette omission est-elle raisonnable et justifiée en quelque manière ? Je ne le crois pas et j'essaie ici d'expliquer pourquoi.

Dans *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pendant la scène 2 de l'acte I, des vers 27 à 34, Bottom improvise ou cite de mémoire un petit poème burlesque et mythologique, qui parodie un passage de l'*Hercule furieux* de Sénèque :

*The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison-gates;*

*And Phæbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish fates.*

Bien que ce texte ait été imprimé en prose dans le quarto de 1600 ainsi que dans le folio de 1623, les éditeurs ont tous rétabli l'écriture versifiée dans la typographie, ce qui n'a jamais soulevé de protestation. Et pour continuer dans la voie rassurante du consensus, rassurante au vu des controverses qui agitent sempiternellement le petit monde des métriciens, il y a dans ce poème un certain nombre de caractéristiques sur lesquelles tout le monde peut s'accorder. Il est inutile de parler des allitérations et des assonances, car sur leur présence le consensus est presque trop facile. Il faut s'occuper des structures fondamentales du vers. Tout le monde admettra que ce sont des vers iambiques. On reconnaît le battement, l'alternance iambique, le mouvement ascendant. Même si au cours d'une discussion quelqu'un insiste pour que l'on prononce *shivering* en trois syllabes au lieu de *shiv'ring*, afin d'introduire une modulation ou résolution anapostique, selon la terminologie de George Saintsbury, cela ne représente qu'un accident passager et ne change pas la tendance générale, la cadence de l'ensemble. Mais cela ne suffit pas à décrire la facture de ces vers. Il faut bien aussi prendre les rimes en considération, et admettre que outre leur fonction propre (entre autres choses, créer des similitudes de sons là où il n'y a pas de similitude de sens), elles renforcent l'effet de clôture qui se produit en fin de vers. Et puisque clôture il y a, on peut d'un coup d'œil ou d'un coup d'oreille évaluer, jauger, mesurer la quantité de parole qui précède la rime et la clôture. On constate à ce moment-là, si on ne l'a pas fait avant, que ces vers de quatre syllabes, ou si l'on préfère, de deux pieds. Mais qu'on les appelle tétrasyllabes ou dimètres, on les considérera nécessairement comme des vers courts, par rapport aux normes les plus courantes. La notion de mesure est en train de faire sa réapparition.

Autre exemple : dans *Love's Labours Lost* (IV.2.101), Nathaniel lit le sonnet que Berowne, ou Biron, a composé pour Rosaline, et qu'il a intercepté :
If love make me forsown, how shall I swear to love?
Ah! Never faith could hold, if not to beauty vow'd;
Though to myself forsown, to thee I'll faithful prove;
Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bow'd.

Nous pouvons à propos de ce poème comme du précédent tomber d'accord sur un certain nombre de points. Nous avons affaire une fois de plus à des vers iambiques, même si ce caractère iambique, c'est-à-dire l'alternance qui va de la brève à la longue ou de la faible à la forte est un peu moins marqué, un peu moins martelé et régulier que dans l'exemple précédent. Mais on peut parler de dominante iambique, qui après une ou deux incartades, impose son mouvement pendulaire, particulièrement sensible dans le quatrième vers : "Those thoughts to me were oaks, to thee like osiers bow'd". On remarque au passage l'omission du pronom that après thoughts, peut-être justement pour obéir à ce que tout le monde continue d'appeler le mètre, non quelquefois sans incongéquence. Autre donnée élémentaire, ce sont des vers rimés, et quand le lecteur arrive à la rime, un peu à bout de souffle, il constate qu'ils ont douze syllabes. Toujours dans un esprit de conciliation œcuménique, considérons comme admissibles les termes d'alexandrins, de dodécasyllabes, de vers de six pieds ou hexamètres, voire de vers de six accents. En tout état de cause il faut admettre aussi que ce sont des vers longs, qui demandent une certaine quantité de souffle, un effort pour tenir la mélodie. Comparés à ceux de Bottom de tels vers produisent un effet différent. Ils traduisent une inspiration différente, et il faut prendre le mot inspiration également au sens physique.

La conclusion provisoire à laquelle je voulais arriver est simplement celle-ci : la comparaison entre les deux poèmes rappelle que la poésie iambique peut présenter des visages différents, car la longueur, c'est-à-dire la durée de vers, entraîne un certain type de phrase et d'émission vocale. Si l'on met en avant une expression prétendument savante comme mètre iambique on s'enferme dans une impasse. On se condoamine à ne pas percevoir la différence entre les vers courts, les vers longs, et ceux qui n'étant ni courts ni longs correspondent à un débit normal et naturel. Le mot mètre ayant déjà servi à autre chose, en l'occurrence à désigner le dessin accentuel, on ne peut plus le réutiliser. Or, à partir de là, le vocabulaire manque. Il y a dans le domaine de la versification comme partout une partie technique dans laquelle on ne peut pénétrer qu'à l'aide d'une terminologie adéquate. Sans elle on risque de ne pas prendre conscience de certains phénomènes. Les spécialistes qui ont détourné le mot mètre ou son équivalent anglais de leur sens premier et ont oublié leur parenté étymologique avec le concept de mesure n'ont pas proposé de remplacant. Il convient donc de le récupérer. L'adoption par le Royaume Uni du système métrique devrait faciliter ce retour. Mais alors par quoi remplacer les expressions mètre iambique, mètre dactylique, etc., si nous décidons de nous en séparer ? Elles désignent, comme indiqué plus haut, une alternance, un mouvement pendulaire, une poussée sinusoidale, un balancement, une pulsion. En anglais, les mots beat ou lilt évoquent assez bien le phénomène. Mais pourquoi ne pas recourir au mot rythme, que tout le monde connaît et utilise abondamment, mais qui malgré sa popularité ou à cause d'elle, mène depuis longtemps la vie errante d'un signifiant
en quête de signifié? Si l'on reparlait de rythme iambique, spondaïque ou autres, ce vocable retrouverait un sens intelligible et opératoire, conforme à des usages anciens et respectables, comme en témoignent le dictionnaire de Littre\textsuperscript{2} ainsi que l'Oxford English Dictionary \textsuperscript{3} Dans le couple indissociable mais non interchangeable que constituent le mètre et le rythme les usagers comprendraient mieux qu'aujourd'hui que le rythme représente une structure purement formelle, non quantifiable, donc non mesurable. En effet ce qui caractérise la pulsation iambique, trochaïque ou autre est la position respective des syllabes fortes et faibles, non le nombre de leurs occurrences à chaque vers. On se reportera aux deux exemples cités plus haut.

Puisque le mot nombre vient d'apparaître, arrêtons-nous un instant sur lui pour observer, au risque de commettre une lapalissade de plus, qu'il se réfère à une donnée intrinsèquement mesurable. Le nombre, dans la poésie versifiée, a des états de service qui ne méritent pas la négligence ou le mépris. Personne n'a oublié le vers célèbre et autobiographique d'Alexander Pope (Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 128), “I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came”. Pourtant le public ne sait pas toujours que Shakespeare a utilisé la même métonymie une quinzaine de fois. Ainsi quand dans Romeo and Juliet Mercutio fait allusion à Pétrarque, “Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in”, (II.4.42), il se réfère en principe à la poésie italienne, dont les mètres, c'est-à-dire les étalonnages qui fixent la longueur des vers, sont fondés sur l'isosyllabisme, comme en français classique. Dans le domaine de la poésie anglaise, où tout donne lieu à des controverses, certains spécialistes comptent les syllabes, d'autres les pieds, d'autres les accents, il y a aussi ceux qui ne comptent rien du tout et ceux qui comptent sur l'ignorance du public, mais de toute façon il n'est pas inutile de savoir compter, surtout si l'on veut comprendre de quoi parle Mercutio. Il faut bien alors utiliser la notion de nombre. Et ce n'est pas seulement à propos de la poésie italienne que Shakespeare parle de nombres. Il applique ce terme à ses propres vers, notamment quand cela lui donne l'occasion d'un jeu de mots, comme dans le sonnet 17 : “And in fresh numbers number all your graces”.

Cet exemple parmi d'autres permet de faire comprendre l'intérêt qu'il y a à réinvestir le mot mètre de sa fonction première, liée à l'idée de mesure. Exemple d'autant plus convaincant que dans ce même sonnet 17, qui est un poème sur la poésie, on trouve une utilisation du mot metre\textsuperscript{4} un peu moins neutre que dans les passages cités précédemment : “The stretched metre of an antique song”. Le participe passé stretched, qu'il faut ici prononcer stretched, en lui appliquant la notion même qu'il exprime, se réfère manifestement à l'aspect dimensionnel de la versification. Il ne peut pas désigner un élément purement accentuel et pulsionnel, ni une configuration comme celles auxquelles on pense quand on parle de vers iambique ou trochaïques. Incidemment on remarque que le mot stretched contient un autre jeu de mots, qui tient du concetto : il se réfère à la notion d'exagération. En vantant la beauté de son ami par des dithyrambes hyperboliques, l'auteur risque d'être accusé plus tard d'avoir tiré un peu trop sur la corde éloquée, d'avoir étiré le procédé. Mais le fait d'avoir utilisé metre au singulier lui confère une dénotation qui conserve en partie le sens propre. Shakespeare confirme ici, après avoir écrit le mot
numbers six vers plus haut, qu'il donne à mesure un sens quantitatif plutôt que rythmique et formel. Ce terme doit donc, dans l'esprit de Shakespeare, se référer au découpage du discours en ces tranches approximativement isochrones que l'on appelle les vers.

Cela suscite inévitablement la question suivante, que pourtant on n'ose souvent pas poser : à quoi sert ce découpage, quelle est la raison d'être de la régularité qui en résulte, et de sa monotonie ? Cette question a souvent été posée, depuis que la poésie versifiée existe, c'est-à-dire depuis des millénaires, et des réponses ont été fournies. Mais sur les origines et les fins de toutes choses chaque génération pose les mêmes questions et entend ou se donne des réponses différentes. D'ailleurs, en matière de création artistique comme en matière de Création tout court, il n'y a peut-être pas de distinction à établir entre les origines et les finalités. A la question en question, donnons précisément la mesure pour réponse. Le discours versifié peut donc se définir comme une déclamation mesurée, une suite harmonieuse de paroles et de silences, chaque vers combinant, en étroite symbiose, une certaine quantité d'air en provenance des poumons, une émission sonore articulée par l'appareil phonique, et une production verbale énoncée de façon à former une unité syntaxique, le tout étant calibré selon les conventions métriques et balisé par la rime, ou à défaut de rime, par une pause rituelle. Il faut à cette liste ajouter la pulsation rythmique, appelée improprement mesure dans certains manuels. Chaque vers constitue un souffle, une mélodie, une phase et une phrase, un moment de notre vie et de notre pensée. Les vers se suivent régulièrement comme les vagues de l'océan, et trois siècles avant que l'auteur français d'un poème en décasyllabes ait interpelé la mer, la mer toujours recommencée, un autre pratiquant du décasyllabe en série utilisa l'image maritime à la fois pour décrire le cours de la vie et former la matrice du poème qu'il était en train d'écrire. Il s'agit du sonnet 60, transcrit ci-dessous d'après l'édition de 1609 :

Like as the waues make towards the pibled shore,
So do our minuites hasten to their end,
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toile all forwards do contend.
Natiuity once in the maine of light,
Crawles to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses gainst his glory fight,
And time that gaue, doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfixe the florissh set on youth,
And delues the paralels in beauties brow,
Feedes on the rarities of natures truth,
And nothing stands but for his sieth to mow.
And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising thy worth, dispight his cruell hand.

La forme de ce poème est déterminée, calculée, mesurée, le nombre de vers fixé d'avance, le nombre de syllabes également, le rythme accentuel est volontairement
binaire et la diction aménagée de façon que les phrases composant le discours aient une durée à peu près égale et soient séparées par de courtes plages de silence. Il ne faut pas donner au mots *phrases* un sens trop strictement grammatical, mais on peut constater que chaque émission vocale possède une certaine unité et cohérence syntaxiques. Le silence en fin de vers, c'est-à-dire ce qu'en langage musical autant que physiologique on appelle la respiration, constitue un élément essentiel du vers, bien que peu de spécialistes en parlent, mais contrairement aux commentateurs universitaires les poètes eux-mêmes connaissent l'importance du silence quand ils parlent de leur art ainsi que, visuellement, celle de l'espace que l'écriture versifiée laisse en blanc sur la page. Rappelons que le mot *vers*, du latin *versus*, implique l'idée d'un arrêt en fin de trajectoire et d'un recommencement.

La mesure du décasyllabe, le mot étant utilisé ici au sens où l'on parle d'une mesure de blé, d'une mesure d'huile, mérite une mention spéciale, car c'est celle que Shakespeare et la poésie anglaise en général ont employée le plus couramment. Nous avons vu que les vers très courts de Bottom produisent un effet de compression parodique tout en favorisant l'énergie pulsative du rythme. A l'inverse les alexandrins de Biron ne se déroulent pas sans quelque alanguissement et demandent au récitant d'emmagasiner une quantité de souffle peut-être inhabituelle. Le décasyllabe, appelé aussi pentamètre, occupe une position privilégiée, qui vient probablement de ce que sa durée d'émission correspond à peu près à celle d'une expiration normale et tranquille. En se forçant à calquer ses phrases et parties de phrases sur les allées et venues régulières de l'air dans les poumons ainsi que sur un nombre de syllabes fixé à l'avance, le poète instaure une harmonie profonde et préétablie entre la pensée et le corps. L'esprit, *spiritus*, retrouve grâce à la poésie déclamée sa dualité et son unité. Par sa substance, son unité syntaxique, sa courbe intonative et son rythme, chaque vers constitue un air, au sens physique et mélodique.

Ces aperçus théoriques soulèvent des objections bien connues. Les descriptions qui conviennent au sonnet 60 et à ses énoncés aphoristiques ne s'appliquent pas nécessairement à toute la poésie versifiée, ni même à celle de Shakespeare dans son ensemble. L'absence de rimes qui caractérise une grande partie du discours dramatique empêche souvent de percevoir auditive la fin des vers, surtout quand il y a des enjambements, rejets et contre-rejets. Entre la construction syntaxique et la segmentation métrique il se produit toutes sortes de tiraillements et de débordements. Le rythme lui-même subit des irrégularités, des variations verticales et horizontales, dues à divers facteurs, notamment l'intonation de la phrase. Le décompte des syllabes, parfois difficile à établir avec précision, fait apparaître des syllabes en trop ou en moins par rapport au schéma de base. Je me contenterai ici d'aborder la question des enjambements, parce qu'elle revient à se demander si, dans la pratique, le vers shakespearien observe toujours la mesure, et de quelle façon. Pour éclairer le débat je propose une expérience, en demandant au lector ou à la lectrice d'en tirer la leçon. Lire deux fois de suite le célèbre monologue de Hamlet, (III.1.56-88), la première fois en suivant la pente naturelle des phrases, leur logique propre, le sentiment qui les anime, comme si le texte était écrit en prose. La seconde fois, en respectant scrupuleusement la pause en fin de vers, même quand il n'y a aucun signe de ponctuation et que la phrase continue. L'élocution mesurée, vers par
vers, se calque sur la présentation graphique de la tirade et correspond à une tradition ancienne, fondée sur les considérations esthétiques qui ont fait l'objet des paragraphes précédents. Le texte transcrit ci-dessous vient du quarto de 1604, complété au vers 83 par un membre de phrase présent dans le texte de 1623 (of vs all). C'est une version intéressante, car la ponctuation semble naturelle, sans doute assez proche de ce que l'auteur a écrit, malgré quelques bizarreries qui ont donné lieu à des discussions :

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether tis nobler in the minde to suffer
The slings and arrowes of outrageous fortune,
Or to take Armes against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them, to die to sleepe
No more, and by a sleepe to say we end
The hart-ake, and the thousand naturall shocks
That flesh is heire to; tis a consummation
Deoutry to be wisht to die to sleepe,
To sleepe, perchance to dreame, I there's the rub,
For in that sleepe of death what dreames may come
When we haue shuffled off this mortall coyle
Must giue vs pause, there's the respect
That makes calamitie of so long life :
For who would beare the whips and scornes of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proude mans contumely,
The pangs of despiz'd loue, the lawes delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurnes
That patient merrit of th'vnworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietas make
With a bare bodkin ; who would fardels beare,
To grunt and sweat vnder a wearie life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The vndiscouer'd country, from whose borne
No trauiiler returns, puzzels the will,
And makes vs rather beare those ills we haue,
Then flie to others that we know not of;
Thus conscience dooes make cowards [of vs all],
And thus the natuie hiew of resolution
Is sickled ore with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprizes of great pitch and moment,
With this regard theyr currents turne awry,
And loose the name of action.

La première lecture, réaliste et naturellement discursive, correspond à ce que l'on entend habituellement sur la scène, pas toujours cependant car on observe depuis quelques années une tendance à revenir à une diction plus formalisée. La seconde
lecture, celle qui justement est formalisée, consiste à respecter et même privilégier le mètre, de façon quasi rituelle et liturgique, en s'efforçant de toujours s'arrêter en fin de vers pour respirer, même quand cela provoque une coupure au milieu d'une phrase, y compris entre un sujet et un verbe ou entre un verbe et un complément d'objet direct. L'enjambement est senti alors non pas comme la victoire passagère de la parole naturelle sur la forme qu'on lui impose arbitrairement, mais au contraire comme la preuve que la forme métrique exerce son empire sur la parole en toutescirconstances, afin de produire une déclamation poétiquement stylisée. Bien entendu m(e) bien l'opération exige un certain doigté. La diction dite mesurée apparaît-elle comme simplement artificieuse et conventionnelle, tout juste capable d'introduire une distanciation doublement démodée, ou comme enrichissant le discours d'un ensemble de résonances véritablement poétiques, par l'effet de mélopée qu'elle produit ainsi que par les ruptures et fusions inattendues qui résultent du découpage métrique. Si l'on tombe dans le syndrome de Quince, qui en récitant le prologue de Pyrame et Thisbé désarticule le discours, l'affaire est entendue. Mais il est permis de penser qu'on peut aussi transmettre tout le contenu, y compris émotif, de la tirade, en respectant les linéaments traditionnels de la diction métrique.

Cela étant dit, le choix du monologue de Hamlet n'est peut-être pas le plus spectaculaire, car sans avoir le caractère ouvertement sentencieux du sonnet 60, il rappelle au moins par son contenu le sonnet 66, “Tired with all these, for restful death I cry”, sorte de litanie répétitive, composée d'une série de propositions infinitives ou participiales écrites sur le même modèle, donc aisément superposables. Il y a plus de fluidité dans le monologue du prince, mais en lui imprimant vocalement une structure plus aphoristique que ce que suggère parfois le mouvement des phrases on crée un décalage fructueux. D'ailleurs les deux lectures proposées ne sont pas intégralement différentes, puisque souvent la phrase se coule naturellement dans le moule décasyllabique. La forme métrique ne fait pas toujours violence au langage, elle impose des cadres, des guides, elle stimule la pensée autant qu'elle la contraint.

La question du décalage entre la diction et la syntaxe se complique quand on sait que certains orateurs politiques et autres pratiquent parfois des interruptions inattendues au milieu d'une phrase, entre un sujet et un verbe par exemple, pour réveiller les auditeurs ou susciter une attente. L'effet obtenu appartient à la rhétorique plus qu'à la poétique, mais ces deux activités se ressemblent et utilisent parfois les mêmes procédés. On attend toutefois de la poésie quelque chose de plus mystérieux, de moins directement utilitaire.

Lorsqu'on parcourt l'évolution du style prosodique de Shakespeare et que l'on constate que le discours devient de plus en plus passionné, semble se faire plus parlé que chanté, plus proche du récitatif que de l'aria, les mêmes questions se posent, avec une difficulté accrue, mais rien ne change fondamentalement. On peut parler de différences de degré plus que de nature. Le ton devient plus personnel et introverti, moins déclamatoire, il y a de moins en moins de rimes et de plus en plus d'enjambements, mais pour le récitant ou l'acteur le dilemme reste identique, entre le choix d'une diction naturelle mais prosaïque et celui d'une élocution mesurée, à moins d'être découragé ou dépassé par l'apparence de liberté excessive que présente
le vers de Shakespeare dans sa dernière phase, et de renoncer à toute tentative de conciliation entre la forme et l'expression. D'autre part parler d'élocution mesurée peut avoir une signification autre que technique et se heurter à un autre type de difficulté. Comment en effet pouvons-nous mentionner le thème de la mesure en présence d'un théâtre et d'un certain nombre de personnages qui se caractérisent notoirement par la démesure ? On peut se méfier d'un idéal de discipline, d'une gymnastique vocale qui auraient pour conséquence de briser les élan, d'éduquer les passions, de créer une atmosphère froide et compassée, en contradiction avec le contenu du texte. La mesure dans la démesure ne peut certes produire qu'un état paradoxal et instable, difficile à atteindre et à maintenir une fois atteint.

C'est ce dont parlait Wordsworth dans la préface écrite en 1800 pour les *Lyrical Ballads*, où il explique comment les mots arrangés méticuleusement procurent du plaisir. Le dessein de la poésie, dit-il, est de produire de l'émotion (*excitation*), associée à une quantité de plaisir encore plus grande (*an overbalance of pleasure*). Mais si les mots qui produisent l'émotion sont puissants en eux-mêmes, ou si les sentiments et les images sont associés à une proportion excessive de douleur, l'émotion risque de dépasser les limites convenables. Or la présence simultanée (*co-presence*) de quelque chose de régulier, quelque chose auquel l'esprit a été accoutumé alors qu'il se trouvait dans un état de tranquillité ou de trouble moins intense, ne peut pas manquer de tempérer et d'atténuer la passion en la mêlant intimement à un sentiment plus ordinaire. Plus loin Wordsworth dit que dans les scènes les plus pathétiques de Shakespeare, le pathétisme ne nous emporte jamais au-delà du plaisir, grâce aux effets de surprise agréables, minimes mais continus et réguliers, qui proviennent de l'arrangement métrique. Il ne parle pas des passages en prose, mais cette omission ne peut que confirmer, ou du moins renforcer sa thèse.

En guise de conclusion, voici un dernier texte, à lire à haute voix. Il s'agit d'un passage taillé sur mesure pour un personnage démesuré. Toutefois, sans en minimiser la grandiloquence, il convient de le déclamer en mesure, c'est-à-dire en s'arrêtant toujours à la fin des vers. C'est la fameuse tirade des prisonniers que prononce Hotspur dans la première partie d'*Henri IV* (I.3.28-68). Avec véhémence, non sans quelque mauvaise foi, il explique devant la cour pourquoi il n'a pas livré ses prisonniers après la bataille de Holmedon, en insérant le portrait burlesque du messager royal. Il est recommandé de respecter certains détails techniques, notamment les dièreses, qui, afin de maintenir les normes métriques, allongent certains mots : ainsi *soldier* se prononce en trois, *impatience* en quatre, *occupation et accusation* en cinq syllabes. Selon les besoins, le mot *prisoners* se prononce en deux ou en trois syllabes. La désinence du participe *perfumed* doit être articulée. L'adjectif *extreme* est accentué sur la première syllabe. Le texte est ici celui du folio de 1623. On remarque l'extrême densité de la ponctuation, en partie effacée dans les éditions courantes. En fait si les signes de ponctuation en fin de vers matérialisent la forme métrique, les nombreuses pauses dans le cours du vers produisent un effet curieusement analogue à celui des enjambements : elles conduisent à une diction hachée, haletante, reflétant un état de nervosité qui contrarie la mélodie tranquille, cathartique du décasyllabe traditionnel. Celle-ci ne s'impose pas ici. La diction la plus respectueuse des traditions ne consiste pas à gommer les accidents, dont l'expres-
sivité vient précisément de ce qu'ils sont sentis comme des accidents. On notera par exemple l'amusant rejet de "So Cowardly" au vers 62, mis en valeur par un point que l'édition Arden remplace par une virgule :

My liege, I did deny no Prisoners.  
But, I remember when the fight was done,  
When I was dry with Rage, and extreme Toyle,  
Breathlesse, and Faint, leaning upon my Sword,  
Came there a certain Lord, neat and trimly drest;  
Fresh as a Bride-groome, and his Chin new reapt,  
Shew'd like a stubble Land at Harvest home.  
He was perfumed like a Milliner,  
And 'twixt his finger and his Thumbe, he held  
A Pouncet-box : which euer and anon  
He gaue his Nose, and took't away againe :  
Who therewith angry, when it next came there,  
Tooke it in Snuffe. And still he smil'd and talk'd :  
And as the Souldiers bare dead bodies by,  
He call'd them vntaught Knaues, Vnmannerly,  
To bring a slouenly vnhandsome Coarse  
Betwixt the Winde, and his Nobility.  
With many Holiday and Lady tearme  
He question'd me: Among the rest, demanded  
My Prisoners, in your Maiesties behalfe.  
I then, all smarting, with my wounds being cold,  
(To be so pestered with a Popingay)  
Out of my Greefe, and my Impatience,  
Answer'd (neglectingly) I know not what,  
He should, or he should not: For he made me mad,  
To see him shine so briske, and smell so sweet,  
And talke so like a Waiting-Gentlewoman,  
Of Guns, & Drums, and Wounds: God saue the marke;  
And telling me, the Soueraign'st thing on earth  
Was Parmacity, for an inward bruise:  
And that it was great pitty, so it was,  
That villanous Salt-peter should be digg'd  
Out of the Bowels of the harmlesse Earth,  
Which many a good Tall Fellow had destroy'd  
So Cowardly. And but these vile Gunnes,  
He would himselfe haue beene a Souldier.  
This bald, vniynted Chat of his (my Lord)  
Made me to answer indirectly (as I said.)  
And I beseech you, let not this report  
Come currant for an Accusation,  
Betwixt my loue, and your high Maiesty.
Comme toutes les tirades, celle-ci est composée d'air, mais un autre élément s'y ajoute, le feu, car Henry Percy, dit Hotspur, personnage tragique et comique à la fois, incarnation de la démesure, est emporté, quoique en mesure, par son éperon brûlant.

Henri SUHAMY
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1  Les citations et les références sont tirées des éditions Arden.

2  "Qualité du discours qui, par le moyen de ses syllabes accentuées, vient frapper notre oreille à certains intervalles."

3  "The measured recurrence of arsis and thesis determined by vowel-quantity or stress, or both combined; ..."

4  La graphie *miter* que l'on trouve dans le texte de 1609 est un peu déconcertante, mais il ne s'agit tout de même pas d'une mitre.
Measuring performance

Measuring suggests computation, so let me begin with some measurements, numbers to which I shall return: 4.6, 2\textsuperscript{11}/2, 1508, 564. Talk to most English men about measuring performance and they will assume that you are talking about the speed of cars. 4.6, my first measure of performance is the number of seconds that a Ferrari F355 takes to accelerate from standstill to 60 miles per hour. It is an exact figure, arrived at in test conditions by a test-driver. For those who know about such things, it is a figure that can be placed in relationship with other numbers, precisely defining the car as hugely powerful, extremely fast. Its exactness is chimeric in practice. Owners of Ferraris are rarely concerned to test out whether their particular car can match the test figures, unless they regularly go out road-racing. Even when a Ferrari owner is accelerating away from traffic-lights, the accuracy of the measurement is unimportant, only the effect on other drivers who will either accept that there is no way that they can out-accelerate the Ferrari or, more often, seek to prove their prowess, their masculinity, by attempting to beat the Ferrari to the next lights. Ferrari drivers usually have no need to prove themselves in such ways, their phallic power already apparent in the mere ownership of the red monster.

Though the measurement is absolute, the effect is relational, relative and capable of subversion. 4.6 seconds is seen by drivers as a threat and its measurement as a statement of power. It is an ideal, achieved in particular circumstances which are rarely available, even to the most aggressive of Parisian drivers. Measurement, in such circumstances, constitutes a consequence for relationships with other cars based on a severely impractical practice, a number that need not be matched but is implicit, an implication of power and control. Measurement here is part of a system, a network of values in which, as Saussure observed of language systems, difference is what matters: dans la langue, il n'y a que des différences.

My other numbers are concerned with theatre performance, yet the implications of my first number indicate the refusal of numbers to function as absolutes. The task of the analysis of measurement is the decoding and definition of the system, the uncovering of the relationships and groupings within which the measurement has meaning. Theatre performance, a system of such immense complexity that most theory has collapsed in the face of it, is a burgeoning field of academic study, for Shakespeare and beyond. The discipline of performance studies is now an accepted field of academic investigation. Yet it is rarely perceived as an area of systematised numerical calculation. But within the practice of theatre, within the work of theatre practitioners and playgoers alike, precise measurement figures far more substantially and visibly. As with the Ferrari's acceleration, the signif-
icance of a particular measurement may be unrelated to its actual achievement in practice, its apparent precision a mask for its meaning.

My second number, two and a quarter, is an example of such measurement. In the programme for the 1995 production of *Julius Caesar* by Peter Hall at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the reader is informed that "the performance is approximately 2\(\frac{1}{4}\) hours in length". Its gestures towards precision have both external and internal implications. The length of a performance has significant consequences for an audience. Perhaps in Stratford, the brevity and rapidity of this *Julius Caesar* serves primarily only to reassure audiences that they will be out of the theatre long before the pubs close. But in London, the length of a performance has distinctly different resonances. Anyone attending a long performance at the Barbican, Adrian Noble's *Hamlet* with Kenneth Branagh for instance, is used to the way that, towards 11 p.m., various members of the audience will leave, not because of displeasure with the production but in order not to miss the last train home. I have found my attention to the last scenes of such a performance damagingly affected by nervous glances at my watch and mental calculations about the time it will take to get to King's Cross Station or, on other occasions, equally nervous assessments of whether I can get to the BBC studio to give my live review immediately after a first night.

The example may seem trivial but it does not seem so to me: the experience of performance, the playgoer's ability to comprehend the implications of production are affected by such factors so that the measurement of a performance's length has significance for the receptivity and pleasure of an audience. Assumptions about the audience's ability to assimilate meaning may be contradicted by such external factors. British theatre companies are also acutely of the economic implications of performance length: the need to pay the stage crew overtime, with a consequentially severe effect on a company's finances, the profitability of a production or even on the company's willingness to mount the production at all. The measurement of length can, then, be a powerful index of response and of economic function.

In other cultural circumstances the effect of performance length on ticket-sales may be acute. When I visited Moscow theatres in 1994 to look at Shakespeare productions there, I was made aware of the radically different position theatre now occupied, in the post-Soviet state. Audience attendances were down, partly, I was told, because the real theatre was now to be found on television, in the daily experience of the political theatre of social change and social upheaval. But long performances were especially at risk. The first question people asked at the box-office was no longer "what is the performance about?" but "what time does it finish?", a concern driven by the way that, in a largely non-car-owning society, audiences are reliant on public transport and that, in the aftermath of the new rule by gangsterism, travelling home late at night was dangerous. Personal safety in London is also seen as a major contributory factor in the reluctance of women to attend theatres on their own, the gender composition of audiences a direct consequence of performance length. For a play like *The Taming of the Shrew*, such changes in audience make-up may be crucial to the interaction of production and spectators.

This interest in the measurement of performance length began surprisingly early. In 1767, John Brownsmith, the prompter at the Haymarket Theatre for many
years, published *The Dramatic Time-Piece*. Its lengthy title-page announces that it is "a Calculation of the length of time every act takes in the performing, in all the acting plays at the Theatres-Royal of Drury-Lane, Covent Garden, and Hay-Market, as minuted from repeated observation, during the course of many years practice". It aims to enable a potential playgoer know "the time of night when half-price will be taken and the certain period when any play will be over". But the time of ending of the performance had for Brownsmit and hence, I presume, for his readers, a moral implication: its information meant that servants could stay home until needed to assist their masters and mistresses leave the theatre "instead of assembling in Public Houses, or Houses of ill Fame". Where a short performance now in Stratford may be seen as an opportunity for the landlords of nearby pubs to increase their takings, Brownsmit offers his record as a means of keeping the working-classes away from such temptations. It matters, in this culture, that a performance of *The Beggar's Opera* will take three hours and five minutes while, for Shakespeare plays, often of course adapted, the time varied from one hour 41 minutes for *Coriolanus* to two hours 39 minutes for *Hamlet*. The five acts of *Julius Cæsar*, according to Brownsmit, last 23, 37, 40, 27 and 22 minutes, adding up to two hours 29 minutes, fourteen minutes longer than Peter Hall's 1995 production.

But the programme's advice about the length of Hall's *Cæsar* also informs audiences that it "will be played without interval" and signs in the foyer each night reinforce the information. In this it followed Terry Hands's 1987 production for the RSC. The information matters not only for the theatre's bar-sales, an important source of company income, but also for the audience's comfort: such a long single span would never be allowed on Broadway where the difficulties of middle-aged men with prostate problems sitting so long are taken seriously. Intervals are a feature of performance that await proper investigation. They constitute one of theatre's sharpest means of defining interpretation, controlling articulation. In *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, the modern convention of placing the interval as the lovers head off to bed both defines the shaping of the play, framing its two movements with Pandarus's two moments of direct audience-address, and denies and mutes the dramatic sharpness of Calchas's entry to demand the exchange of Cressida viciously hard on the heels of the lovers' one night of love. The RSC's previous production of *Julius Cæsar*, directed by Stephen Pimlott in 1991, held back the interval until after Act IV scene 1, the scene for the triumvirs marking names for execution. Only when the action of the play left Rome did Pimlott allow a break. But the massive set designed by Tobias Hoheisel, needed to be struck by the stage crew for the remainder of the performance and it was of such enormity that the intervals regularly lasted forty minutes, longer than the second half of the performance which usually ran only thirty-five. Such intervals, common enough in the opera house, are unknown in British theatres and audiences were confused both by the interval length and by the performance's manifest imbalance of its parts.

Hall — and Hands before him — identified the sweep of the play as one that denies or at least resists a performance's articulation by the interposition of an interval, choosing instead to follow Elizabethan practice and allow the play its single arch. Our academic understanding of Shakespearean dramatic structures, helped by
such brilliant work as Emrys Jones's *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* now recognises the predisposition of Shakespearean tragedy towards a central plateau, a long series of unbreakable action across the centre of the play. Theatre directors, attempting to accommodate performances to companies' and audiences' expectations of intervals, had long understood the problem. But Julius Caesar and Macbeth are the only plays regularly permitted to articulate their construction without the artificial structuring device on audience perception that an interval constitutes.

The length of Hall's *Caesar* was a direct consequence of his attitude to pace. Actors were driven by the director towards an unusually rapid delivery. The impetus was partly derived from Hall's entirely reasonable perception of the play's rapidity, the delivery matching and illuminating the pace of the dramatic action. But it was also a consequence of Hall's belief in the necessity of Elizabethan verse being spoken at speed. Hall has become obsessed with a metronomic approach to Shakespearean verse. He sits in rehearsal counting five stresses for each verse line, tapping the stresses with a pencil and demanding a pause at the end of the line, whatever the syntax may be doing. Hugh Quarshie, who played Mark Antony, in Hall's *Caesar*, has dubbed the approach, in a marvellous phrase, "iambic fundamentalism" and complains that it is deeply inhibiting for actors, less the discovery of meaning in the rhythm of the verse than a constriction on that discovery, a denial of the provocative tensions between verse rhythm and syntactical meaning in Shakespearean language. Its inhibition on the actors' freedom is also an inhibition on audience's comprehension. I was painfully aware, on the first occasion on which I saw the production, summer 1995, that actors seemed to be speaking with one eye on the clock, determined to bring the performance in at the two and a quarter hour mark set. Speeches rushed by monochromatically, their definition of the stress beats denying any variety, and hence local effect and colour.

In a notorious letter, Chekhov complained to his wife Olga Knipper about Stanislavsky's production of *The Cherry Orchard*: some relatives had reported that in the last act Stanislavsky "drags things out most painfully. This is really dreadful! An act which ought to last for a maximum of twelve minutes — you're dragging it out for forty. The only thing I can say is that Stanislavsky has ruined my play." Chekhov saw that speed is meaning, that the act played as fast as he intended denied the fatalist tragedy that Stanislavsky's approach was designed to reveal. But in the equally extreme case of Hall's *Caesar*, speed denies meaning, prevents the audience following the drama's argument. When I saw the production again the following January, it took ten minutes longer, the actors now taking control and finding some of the detailing that they had previously had to refuse themselves.

For the timing of the performance was deliberately phrased as "approximately 2½ hours in length". Such measurements are necessarily imprecise but the differences can be highly significant. Stephen Pimlott's production of *Richard III* at Stratford the same year claimed that the performance is "approximately 4 hours in length" but when I saw it first, on the night immediately following the Press Night, a slip had been inserted in the programme saying that "the running time for tonight's performance is approximately 3½ hours". In a production heavily laden with stage mechanics the running time can change significantly: David Troughton, who played
Richard, informed a seminar that the previous night's performance had shaved seven minutes off the running time, partly because the machinery had all worked smoothly but also because the actors felt the confidence to let the performance move more quickly. In any case, the programme's measurement of performance length derives from an estimate, not a precise measurement, in the later stages of rehearsals, at the point when the copy for the programme needs to reach the printers. Subsequent to that, the production may decide to cut speeches or whole scenes, to eliminate slow-moving effects or to speed up over-portentous delivery.

Performance analysis is inhibited both by the imprecision and the inadequacy of its data. It is not only the exact measurement of performance that may be lacking but also the range of variation within which a particular performance may be placed. The analysis of the meaning of performance is directly dependent on the measurement of performance but it is not only a matter of a critic sitting with stop-watch in hand: the full extent of the meaning that a production generates will be defined by the full extent of its timings as much as by other necessarily immeasurable factors. Theatre prompt-books often carry detailed notes by the stage managers on the running time night by night, a need to measure that suggests their inheritance of the fascination with timings of John Brownsmith two hundred years earlier.

But the internal timings may also be highly significant. Jonathan Miller's 1987 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* for the RSC defined the major switch in Katherine's relationship to Petruchio through a long pause in the sun/moon scene (IV.6). As Katherine (Fiona Shaw) observed the sun, looking at it through her wedding-ring, she silently meditated on her marriage before resolving to accept it and value it. The prompt-book for the production indicates that the stage-managers became intrigued by this pause, timing it each night as they waited for the next lighting cue, dutifully and delightedly Fiona Shaw's setting new records as the pause lengthened in the course of the run. Like the famous pause in Peter Brook's *Measure for Measure* before Isabella would kneel to intercede for Angelo's life in the last scene or the one before the entry of the king in Robert Sturua's production of *King Lear* with his Georgian company in Tbilisi, each performance allowed the moment the maximum space the performers believed the audience could or would tolerate. The pause's length thus measures the actor's silent investigation of the action and the audience's understanding of the tremendous import of an event that the production found outside language, in the space of performance between speech.

The third of the numbers I mentioned at the beginning was 1508. This is the official figure for the maximum capacity of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford this season, with the current configuration of seating and permitted number of standing spaces. I shall use it both in relationship to the measurement of theatre space but also to the measurement of audience size. The three theatres that the Royal Shakespeare Company run in Stratford — the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the Swan and the Other Place — attract the most particular and peculiar audiences. It may possibly constitute the largest audience for Shakespeare in the world but it certainly constitutes the most heterogeneous: international Shakespeare
scholars, the world's theatre experts, regular theatre-goers, local residents, tourists both English-speaking and those without a word of English in their vocabularies.

Like all other theatre companies, the RSC knows the size of its nightly audiences. It can identify and measure both its percentage capacities and also its percentage box-office performance by performance. The two measures are significant in their differences: a production may be nearly full but the box-office significantly lower as a percentage of its maximum, a consequence of, for instance, the number of customers paying full-price for their seats compared with the number coming on a group booking at a discounted rate, or the number paying a high price for a seat in the stalls compared with the number paying much less for the balcony. A play that attracts groups or a play that appeals more to those unable or unwilling to pay a high price per ticket may be nearly full but the distribution of the audience within the house will be a measure of the nature of the production's or the play's appeal. The two ranges of appeal — play or production — are eloquent distinctions of measurement. Some plays in the repertoire will attract near-capacity audiences irrespective of the quality of the production: Adrian Noble's dreary production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1995, trashed by the reviewers and disliked by almost everyone who has seen it, has still "done excellent business", as the jargon has it, while Trevor Nunn's production of *All's Well that Ends Well*, starring Peggy Ashcroft, one of the most famous and finest Shakespeare productions of the century, played in Stratford to audiences as small as 25%.

The RSC has developed a vast body of information over its life that suggests that a particular Shakespeare play will produce a particular size of audience, completely irrespective of the production. The RSC's productions in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre are, by the terms of its Royal Charter, restricted to the plays of Shakespeare: non-Shakespearean plays in their repertory, which substantially outnumber their Shakespeare work, cannot be played there. Yet the financial constrictions, consequent on that crucial measurement of 1508, the tremendous financial commitment that productions in the main house represent, mean that the repertory for that theatre is far less than the full range even of the Shakespeare canon. At present, the main-house repertory is approximately twenty plays: we cannot now, given the current state of theatre economics, expect to see large-scale main-house productions of plays like *Timon*, *Cymbeline*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* or even *All's Well That Ends Well*. Financial measurement preclude them.

Even so, marketing, that mysterious part of the theatre industry, can produce surprising effects. David Thacker's *Coriolanus* in 1994, starring Toby Stephens, did reasonably but not remarkably well in the Swan Theatre (capacity 458). Since the opening of the Swan in 1986, the RSC has always had the problem of finding the right London theatre to which to transfer the Swan productions. An initial attempt to use the Mermaid Theatre proved financially disastrous and, since then, productions have either moved to the Pit or to the main-stage at the Barbican, neither of which in any way reproduces the stage size or audience configurations of the Swan. A recent attempt to use the Young Vic Theatre has worked for two productions but there is this season anxious discussion about what to do with Adrian Noble's production of *The Cherry Orchard*, the triumph of the last season.
With *Coriolanus*, the company took the bold decision to move the production up into the much larger expanse of the Barbican main stage. An aggressive marketing poster campaign used a photograph of Toby Stephens, face and shirt terrifyingly drenched in blood, charging violently at the camera. It built on the cult success of the film *Natural Born Killers* and carried the slogan “A natural born killer too”.

There were protests in the newspapers but the effect on the box-office was extraordinary: sales, particularly of cheaper seats and stand-by tickets, were exceptionally high. The campaign may have put-off middle-aged theatre-goers but had plainly attracted a large audience of young people, many of whom had never been to a Shakespeare production and had no idea what the play was going to be about.

Marketing Shakespeare and measuring the response to marketing is a precise indication of the cultural placing of Shakespeare in late-twentieth-century Britain. Analysis of contemporary Shakespeare production within the framework of the academic discipline of cultural studies hardly ever takes any notice of the profound implications of audience measurement. If the analysis may not actually be vitiated by the evidence of measurement, it can certainly frequently be transformed, placed into a precisely evidenced context to define the exact details of production reception on the one hand and, on the other, the company's own understanding implications of its history for its decisions about productions.

Yet the details of audience measurement for box-office and capacity are acknowledged to be inaccurate about the exact composition of the audience. The very heterogeneity of the Stratford audiences, the most extreme example of the problem, means that the reception of production is never unified. This is not simply a matter of taste. I regularly find myself in strong disagreement with other Shakespeare performance scholars about the value and meaning of an event within a production but we all fall within one category of consumption, that bizarre subset of Shakespeare audiences constituted by academic Shakespeareans, a group that may imagine itself to be the sole arbiters of taste yet one to which theatre companies pay little attention since their economic value is small. Even at those times, for example during the biennial International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford, when the theatre seems to be full of Shakespeare scholars, they do not amount to more than 20% of the theatre's capacity. But that substantial segment of a Stratford audience that does not understand a word spoken on stage perceives the production in a markedly different way. Analyses of audience response are premised on an assumption that the audience can be treated as a coherent, single-minded mass but that is clearly not the case. The proper understanding of cultural consumption, of Shakespeare as consumerist product, would necessitate a much more exacting measurement of the varieties of audience and their discrepant perceptions than anything currently available.

My examples so far have been of the choice of play itself but the argument applies equally strongly to production style. The most common complaint heard from actors in main-house Shakespeare productions at the RSC concerns the set designs, an objection often echoed by theatre-critics and academic Shakespeareans. Because of the length of time it takes to build sets, the design has to be fixed well in
advance of the beginning of rehearsals which, even at Stratford, are rarely more than eight weeks long. The elaborate sets define interpretation before the actors can have any influence on the development of the production and, unsurprisingly, they feel as a result excluded from the creative processes. They are also often presented with a stage-set that is complex and even dangerous for them to work on. Its mechanical devices can be restrictive and prone to break-down. Stephen Pimlott's 1995 Richard III, another production designed by Tobias Hoheisel, made extensive use of an inner-stage platform which rolled out from a huge sliding-door in the back wall of the set. Dubbed by the actors "the CD-player", the platform was entirely dependent on electrical stage machinery to move in and out without any manual over-ride. It regularly stuck, either in or out. At one preview, when it had been particularly liable to eccentric and unexpected movement, David Troughton, playing Richard, looked straight at the audience, knelt down beside the platform and crossed himself, praying that this time it would move on cue. In discussion, Troughton has made it clear that he would have preferred to play on a bare stage with a curtain in the back wall. But the elaboration of the sets for the main-house at Stratford, even when they work efficiently and are approved of by actors, is a direct consequence of an assumption about audience measurement. The RSC's extravagant sets for the RST, its house style of strong and elaborate design, is not an aesthetic decision consequent on directors' and designers' theories about the most effective or important way of interpreting a Shakespeare text. It is a style driven by marketing, by the assumption that the audience that the company needs to attract into those 1508 seats is one that would otherwise go to big London shows, an audience that is assumed to want the RSC's visual style to rival the theatrical experience of Cats or Les Misérables. Because the numbers by which it measures its audiences are large, the RSC must give its audience what it understands the audience to demand. The sets are measured not against the play but within the system of sets for big theatres that seek a tourist audience. All other considerations, for example about the appropriateness of the sets to late-twentieth-century readings of the plays, are subordinated to theatre economics.

My final number was 564. The RSC programme for Adrian Noble's Romeo and Juliet states "The text used in this production is the new Cambridge Shakespeare from which approximately 564 lines have been cut". Measurement suggests the comparison of something to a standard, a definition of relationship. In the matter of cuts, the performance is measured against a preceding text, the play-script, the assumed authority for the words spoken.

Of course, the cutting of a Shakespeare play has a long history. I, like others, doubt that anything approaching a full text of Hamlet, either in its second Quarto or first Folio form, was ever played in the Jacobean theatre. When Davenant's mildly adapted version of the play was published in 1676 it carried the following information, directed "To the Reader":

This Play being too long to be conveniently Acted, such places as might be least prejudicial to the Plot or Sense, are left out upon the Stage: but that we may no way wrong the incomparable
Author, are here inserted according to the Original Copy with this Mark.²

The statement is a complex and resonant one. It marks the opening of an explicit gap between text and performance in the representation of the text, a gap that needs identifying as a space between the conceptualisation of Shakespeare as a location of value, "the incomparable Author", and the theatre as a place with its own constrictions, a place in which that which is "too long to be conveniently Acted" necessitates abbreviation. The consequences are substantial. Many speeches which no modern full-scale performance would dream of eliminating are marked as having been cut in performances of this version: for example, Hamlet's instructions to the players, "Speak the speech, I pray you", the first forty-five lines of III.2, are to go, lines which we recognise as able to be cut without being "prejudicial to the Plot" but whose significance to modern understandings of the play defines the cut as certainly prejudicial to "Sense".

But the treatment here of the text for a scene like I.1 suggests a very different process at work. A modern edited text of the scene based on Q2 usually runs to 176 lines (the scene is nearly twenty lines shorter in F1). Of those, the 1676 quarto marks fifty-four for cutting, reducing the scene by nearly a third. The longest single cut is fourteen lines, the description of the portents in Rome "A little ere the mightiest Julius fell" but many of them are single lines.

Scholars investigating a play's stage history minutely identify such cuts, examining their significance for interpretative choices made in production. Occasionally there is a rather saner recognition that cutting is a matter of theatrical expedience, of an acting company's awareness of different priorities in performance. The cuts marked in I.1 in the 1676 text generate a scene that is more dynamic, more excited and animated, less prone to digressive accounts of material that, whatever its intrinsic worth, disrupt the forward momentum of the scene and hence produce a much slower impetus for the opening of the play. It ensures, for instance, that the theatre audience have less time to wait for the moment they are expectantly anticipating, the first entrance of Hamlet himself, the star's first appearance. Significantly, no line is "pricked" down while the Ghost is on stage, only segments of the lengthy conversations before and after his appearances. The cut version can be precisely measured against the conflated text and we can note that much — though not all — of the material omitted in the Folio text is cut here.

However, my interest in the activity of cutting and the measurement of performance that it enables is not mathematical but perceptual. Almost the whole of an audience is totally unaware of cuts, even when they have, at Stratford, read their programmes carefully and watch armed with the information that a certain number of lines have been cut. I saw Adrian Noble's 1995 Romeo and Juliet twice but I must admit that I could not identify for you a single one of the "approximately 564" lines which were not spoken. I also have to state that I feel unembarrassed about admitting that I cannot. I do not find myself seated in the theatre checking off the lines in my mind against my knowledge of the play. My consciousness of the text against which I measure the performance is not statistical, not a matter of putting
mental ticks and crosses against the lines. Even in a production as poor as Noble's *Romeo*, which I found myself watching with considerable disengagement as it tediously unfolded, the text of a play with which I think I can claim a reasonable familiarity was not present within my activity of watching.

Of course there are moments at which the text can be immanent for a particular member of the audience. One of my students noted — I had not — that, in Pimlott's *Richard III*, from which, I gather, some 700 lines had been cut, a figure which the programme did not choose to announce, Hastings' speech as he was lead off for execution in III.4 did not begin with the lines "Woe, woe for England! Not a whit for me./ For I, too fond, might have prevented this". The playing of the scene denied the self-conscious re-evaluation in the lines, Hastings' awareness that his own stupidity did not warrant grief and his redirection of the significance of the event towards its consequences for the country rather than the personal tragedy he might have seen it as constituting. The production played Hastings' last exit as personal, denied the political resonances — of that I was perfectly aware — but the precise textual mechanism by which such a reading was enabled went, for me, unremarked.

I was shocked that, at the end of Gale Edwards' production of *The Taming of the Shrew* for the RSC in 1995, after the dark, bleak reading Josie Lawrence gave Katherine's final speech, Pettruccio did not say "Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" as he knelt, appalled by what had happened to their relationship. There was, in the tormented account of the play's ending that the production argued for, simply no way in which the line could have been spoken, its cutting a necessary consequence of a particular take on the play, of the production's reading of the play against its grain. But a colleague of mine, seated next to me, did not note the cut of such a famous and familiar line, even though he was fully aware of what the production was arguing about the text. I do not find this anecdote critical of my colleague, even though I leave him anonymous; it is, rather, a definition of the ways in which the text is being made differently manifest, divergentely present for spectators in the course of the experience of production.

Measuring the treatment of the text in this manner is not necessarily engaged with the particular audience member's acceptance or rejection of a production's interpretation; it is not a factor of a measuring of a production against the particular reading that the spectator believes the play must have, so that a production is damned or praised for its willingness to align itself with the putative version the playgoer wishes all productions of the play to have. I, for one, always attempt to watch a production on its own terms. But the measuring of the presence of text, in the examples I have been using through the awareness of its local absences, is a measure of the playgoer's awareness of the text's immanence, of the ways that his/her particular perception of performance and knowledge of the text conjoin and interrelate.

In 1983, Patrice Pavis used a questionnaire for his students studying theatre semiotics at the Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. One of the questions, 10(b), asked "what role is given to dramatic text in production" and Pavis comments that "the text in performance does not always have the same status". My
argument is stronger. In a rich variety of ways, both the processes of production, of mise-en-scène, and the experiences of the spectators are measured against a concept of the text. The production of a Shakespeare text devises a reading, constructs an intention for the communication of meaning based on its own location of the text within a wide range of determinants: for example, its assumptions about the play, the work's cultural and theatrical history, the theatre company's cultural placing and the assumed nature of its audiences. Within a foreign-language Shakespeare production, a non-Anglophone production, the spoken text is itself processed and consumed in relation both to a range of degrees of knowledge of the Shakespeare text and in relation to the history of translations of that text, its variances from culturally normative presentations of that play.

We can, as theatre researchers or as students of Shakespeare, investigate with comparative ease the construction of the presentation of meaning. We can explore the structures of intentionality within a production, for example by interviewing a number of the theatre workers associated with the generation of the production. But we have no mechanism to understand the degrees of immanence of the text in the consciousness of the consumers of the performance. This is not simply a matter of awareness of cuts, of the visible absences of segments of the generating text, even though I have used that as the basis for my examples. It can, just as easily, be assumptions about character and action, about the historical or contemporary placing of meaning, about the relationship of a production to the history of the play in performance. Shakespeare is not and cannot be measured in performance. The audience fragments into its constituent individuality, dissolving the myth of a unity of reception and creating instead an unassimilable and unmeasurable diversity. Theatre critics and Shakespeare scholars, our most frequent sources of information about audience response to a production, are a statistical aberration, a deviation from anything approaching a median reception, let alone the illusion of a normative one. In the end, we can only measure ourselves.

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2 Hamlet (1676) sig. [A]2a.