Who Heard the Rhymes, and How:
Shakespeare's Dramaturgical Signals

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The Audience

"The many-headed multitude" was how, in 1601, a contemporary referred to the Shakespearian audience (Salgado 1975:22). "Amazed I stood," wondered an anonymous versifier in 1609, "to see a crowd/ Of civil throats stretched out so lowd;/ (As at a new play) all the rooms/ Did swarm with gentles mix'd with grooms."[1]

This wide-ranging appeal considerably antedated Shakespeare's plays: though he very significantly shaped its later course, he profited from rather than created the solidly popular status of the Elizabethan and, above all, the London stage, for "London was where the players could perform in their own custom-built playhouses, week after week and year after year. . . . In London there were regular venues, regular audiences, regular incomes."[2] The first playhouses had been built in 1576; at least two professional "playhouses were flourishing in 1577."[3] (Shakespeare was then a country lad of thirteen.) The urgency of clerical denunciations, then as now, provides particularly revealing evidence of the theater's already well-established place in many Londoners' hearts.[4]

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[1] *Idem*:29. Festivity was of course a far more important aspect of Elizabethan life. "The popular culture of Elizabethan England . . . is characterized first and foremost by its general commitment to a world of merriment" (Laroque 1991:33).

[2] Gurr 1992:6. And, just as today, those who wielded political power took most seriously the ancillary economic benefits produced by London's professional theaters. See Harrison 1956:112-14, for the authorities' immensely positive reaction, when appealed to by the watermen who ferried playgoers back and forth across the Thames, and whose profitable employment was being interfered with.

[3] Harrison 1956:23. For the 1576 date, see Gurr 1992:7.

[4] Yet another body of evidence comes from letters and other documents indicating how regularly foreign visitors to London made it their business to attend theatrical productions. There is no entry under "Tourists" in Halliday 1964, but there ought to be.

To be sure, there was some reason for clerical denunciations. The Elizabethan theaters sometimes produced considerable disturbances, both inside and outside their walls. The Lord Mayor of London declared, in 1593, "that they give opportunity to the refuse sort of evil disposed and ungodly people that are within and about this City" (Harrison 1956:19-20). An important source of difficulty stemmed from the fact that the members of theatrical companies were not enrolled in any of the traditional craft guilds, which rendered them liable to be "listed as vagabonds and masterless men and hence . . . subject to arrest and imprisonment."[5] Even the protection offered by sympathetic noblemen, who enrolled the players as their nominal (and sometimes their actual) "servants," could not entirely repair the situation. There were often tensions, too, as between the theater professionals and the university men who sought to milk this new profession. "The Elizabethan theatre was anything but aristocratic";[6] university-trained men, whether born to the aristocracy or not, were apt to put on airs.

Contemporaries writing about the Elizabethan audience naturally focused on aristocratic, notable figures rather than on ordinary playgoers, just as, for exactly the same reasons, "they wrote more about exceptional audience behaviour than about ordinary audiences" (Gurr 1992:226). But Halliday's summary is both objective and, from my perspective, provocatively on point (Halliday 1964:43):

> It used to be thought that the Elizabethan audience was an ignorant and ill-smelling assembly, capable of nothing but bawdiness, inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. Ill-smelling they may have been, but in those days when few could read, and talk took the place of books [movie houses, television, records, and tapes] the ear must have been delicately trained and quick to appreciate fine language. No doubt some of the gallants who sat on the stage and smoked, and some of the ladies in the galleries, came to be seen rather than to listen, but recent research discovers an audience made up for the most part of eager and attentive listeners, generous with their applause, though equally ready to hiss and mew their disapproval.

Salgado 1975 contains many such reports, originally written in French, German, and Latin, as well as in English.

[5] Parrott and Ball 1943:46. See "The Laws of Plaing," in Gurr 1992:27-33.

[6] Parrot and Ball 1943:48. See "Social Divisions in the Playhouses," in Gurr 1992:215-22.

Indeed the commander of an East India Company ship, sailing in Asia in 1607 and 1608, regularly had staged on board his ship such plays as *Richard III* and *Hamlet*, "which I permit," he recorded in his journal, "to keep my people from idleness and unlawful games, or sleep" (Salgado 1975:28). When not only the audience, but also the actors, of Shakespeare's plays could be composed of the raggle-taggle sort who made up ships' crews, without much question there must be a clear and important bond between and among the highly literate author and his largely doubtfully literate audience.[7]

The Theater

Elizabethan playhouses were wonderfully impermanent structures, built quickly and of materials resistant to neither fire nor time. It is also true, as Andrew Gurr has well noted, that more scholarly attention has been devoted to tangible issues of playhouse design than to subtler but also more important issues: "it is easier to dispute fixities like the shape of a stage than such intangible matters as an Elizabethan audience's awareness of itself as a visible presence."[8] Consider the following description:[9]

> Halfway into the pit there projected a platform upon which most of the action of the play was presented. It is important to realize that the spectators were not only in front of the stage as in a modern theatre but actually on three sides of it. At the rear of the platform was an inner, or alcove, stage separated from the front by a . . . draw-curtain, and flanked by doors which allowed the actors to enter directly onto the platform . . . . Over the alcove-stage was an upper stage; it also had a curtain which could cut it off from the view of the audience when it was not in use . . . .

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[7] Salgado says that this journal is "generally regarded as genuine," though the original manuscript has disappeared; it has been suggested that John Payne Collier, both a scholar and a celebrated forger, may have concocted these accounts (Salgado 1975:28 and n. 1).

[8] 1992:115. But see the close examination of actual stagecraft in, e.g., Slater 1982. A very different perspective can be found in Greene 1988.

[9] Parrot and Ball 1943:52-54. They also reproduce a detailed reconstruction of the floor plan of the Globe Playhouse, drawn by Professor John C. Adams (53).

Again, we do not know exactly what was on that platform, or stage; we do however know what was *not* on it, which is most of what, today, we think of as stage scenery:[10]

> Public theatres in Shakespeare's time had not much in the way of scenery. There were hangings of tapestry or painted cloth, much as there would be in most London houses of any consequence, and we know there was a certain amount of stage furniture in the way of stools, thrones, arbours, statues and the like, which could be set in position or taken away as required, but there seems to have been little or nothing to serve as a specific, localized background against which the actors would play . . . . This absence of localized scenery must have made the combats and battle-scenes in some of the Histories a good deal easier to stage and more effective to watch, because when such a scene is played on a bare or nearly-bare Elizabethan stage, the action is concentrated, and the dramatic illusion sustained, more easily than in a fully-representational set.

I will return to this matter of the concentration of action, which concentration inevitably applies to virtually everything taking place on the stage, whether active or merely verbal. Audience focus, and audience attention, were not much distracted from the players and their words, for the actors and the actors' words were, in essence, all (or certainly most) of what there was to a theatrical production. There were costumes, to be sure, and props of various sorts, sometimes fairly elaborate, even costly. Some props, on the other hand, were both extremely simple and, to our minds, distinctly gruesome. In *King Lear*, Cornwall has put out one of Gloucester's eyes, at which point one contemporary text provides the revealing stage direction, "Cornwall pulls out one of Glosters eyes, and stampes on it" (Wells and Taylor 1986:1050). Cornwall is temporarily interrupted by a loyal servant of the helpless duke, then freed of this humane and nobly futile interference by Regan, who picks up a sword and runs the servant through from behind. Cornwall then returns to his grisly work, exclaiming, "out vild Jelly."[11] It seems apparent that a gutta percha ball, or something of the sort, has been employed, with what other possible grisly accompaniments we do not know.

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[10] Holmes 1972:112, 118. For more detail, see "The Staging," in Gurr 1992:172-211.

[11] Wells and Taylor 1986:1050. For reader convenience, citations to this source will also be tracked by a footnoted act and scene reference, keyed for the sake of uniformity to the various volumes in the Signet Shakespeare, in the following form: III:vii, line 82.

In short, though it remains true that "this was not a realistic stage" (Parrot and Ball 1943:60), neither was it a Punch-and-Judy puppet show. A degree of sensationalism is also a theatrical constant (informing the very meaning of "theatrical" in our language). "The play's the thing," as Hamlet declares: Elizabethan actors freely used whatever devices they had, and just as freely did without those they did not have. "The variety and scope of the language, the emotional rhythms of poetic speech of the Elizabethan drama were partly the result of the Elizabethan theatre" and all its physical possibilities and constraints (Parrot and Ball 1943:60).

Rhyme

And what is more, if the early plays of Shakespeare are any indication, Elizabethan dramatists seem to have had a trick or two up their sleeves that we, in our time, have lost both sight and sound of. In a strictly formal sense, Shakespeare, like most Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, employs three basic modes: rhymed verse, blank verse, and prose. It is not always easy to *hear* the difference between blank verse and prose, especially (a) when both are written to simulate speech and (b) both occur in the same work and are written by the same hand. Indeed, there are passages the nature of which has regularly produced disagreement among editors. Here, for example, is a passage printed as verse in the Oxford original-spelling edition (Wells and Taylor 1986:519):[12]

> Got with much ease. Now merrily to horse:
> The theeves are al scattred, and possest with feare
> So strongly, that they dare not meete each other,
> Each takes his fellowe for an officer,
> Away good Ned, Olde-castle sweates to death,
> And lards the leane earth as he walkes along,
> Wert not for laughing I should pittie him.

This is Prince Hal speaking, after he has despoiled the despoilers, stealing from Falstaff and his fellow thieves what, playing the role of highwaymen, they themselves have just stolen. But in his edition of *1 Henry IV,* Maynard Mack prints this same speech as prose, with a footnote acknowledging that it has been "printed as verse by Pope and many later editors" (1965:n. 71). There is in fact no way to resolve the disagreement: to quote myself, "except when it is used to present poetry, or to record actual speech, and the

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[12] *1 Henry IV*, II:2.

like, prose may logically and conveniently be defined as the written form of a language" (Raffel 1994:7). Presented as blank verse, the passage scans quite acceptably. But this is not conclusive, since much prose can be scanned as verse, and that fact no more constitutes a full definition of poetry than does the non-scannability of, say, Walt Whitman's verse. The borderlines between prose and verse are neither sharp nor always readily perceivable. The situation may be summarized as follows (Raffel 1994:6):

> 1. Poetry, as compared to prose, generally places greater emphasis on *the sound of language*, on its music and rhythm, and also employs a greater intensity of verbal colors of all sorts.
> 2. Poetry, as compared to prose, lays diminished emphasis on literal, linear *significance* and relies far more on metaphor and other indirect ways of meaning. There are ranges of operation, to be sure, and some prose becomes "poetic," just as some poetry becomes "prosaic."

But the difference between rhymed and unrhymed verse is relatively easy to hear, which makes that difference available, should the poet care to use it, as a signaling device. All linguistic, like all dramatic, signaling devices, are of course procedures designed to heighten and clarify communication by concentrating the listener's attention—by focusing his mind more closely, and more in the particular direction desired: "outside poetry rhyme is commonly thought of as a 'poetical' device, but in fact it is a broadly attested linguistic structure, used for marking the ends of important words and phrases, to make them memorable . . . . Its effect on audiences and readers both inside and outside poetry is well known" (Preminger and Brogan 1993:1059-60). And it has long been noticed that, in addition to using more rhyme in his earlier than in his later plays, in these same early plays Shakespeare shows a clear tendency to employ it as just such a signal, rounding off a scene or an act with a rhyming couplet. It has also not escaped attention that, though in his later plays he "discarded [rhyme] as a staple medium, . . . he retained it for certain effects, to clinch an aphorism and to define a scene, and such minor uses of rhyme afford a limited index of chronology, for they gradually dwindle and ultimately disappear in the latest plays" (Halliday 1964:411).

I do not contest the designation of rhyme-signals as "minor uses": there are issues far more important than rhyming techniques in all of Shakespeare's plays, nor would Shakespeare have achieved worldwide fame and popularity if his use of rhyme-signals were the most significant thing to be found in his plays. All the same, if it can be shown that in the early plays he used rhyme-signals both more commonly and in a much greater variety of ways than has previously been suspected, it seems to me that

matters of some importance will necessarily be touched upon. A signal spoken from a stage, in other words, is a signal meant to be heard, and to be understood, by those in the audience. Any playwright at or near the beginning of his professional career, even Shakespeare, is likely to be maximally attuned to the capabilities and expectations of his audience. Later in his career he will be, as Shakespeare plainly was, a good deal more confident, less concerned about an audience approval that he has already earned, and also more interested in experimentation, in pushing at the boundaries of his craft.[13] And while he was earning his reputation and his self-confidence, he would naturally remain closer to his audience's established understanding and capacities.

If in his earlier work Shakespeare was employing rhyme to effect such signals, it is extremely unlikely that he was merely wasting his actors' breath, or playing intellectual games with himself. His audience, or some significant part of it, surely could and did hear, note, and understand what he was doing. Indeed, had they not, and had they not taken pleasure in his giving them such signals and in their own ability to correctly interpret them (neither side of which need be fully conscious procedures: things can be fully *deliberate* without being fully conscious), the odds would have to be heavily against his continued use of any such signals. Elizabethan audiences were notably devoid of public shyness. When the audience was happy, the actors and their playwright (to quote a 1610 observer) could count on "enormous applause to full houses" (Salgado 1975:30). But though they were "for the most part . . . eager and attentive listeners," Elizabethan playgoers were "equally ready to hiss and mew their disapproval" (Halliday 1964:43). As G.B. Harrison explains, "to the keen Elizabethan playgoers, the drama was part of his life. He never ceased to discuss, quote, and criticize" (1956:55).

Accordingly, establishing the clear existence of many more, and much more commonly employed, rhyme signals than have previously been perceived should lead us to reconsider 1) the nature of spoken verse, 2) the capacities of a significantly nonlettered audience, and 3) the interpenetration of spoken and lettered forms, both a) in a society partially lettered and partially nonlettered, like that of Elizabethan England, and b) also in our own, which we tend—mistakenly—to think of as not only basically but virtually exclusively lettered. To put it differently: if so subtle a literate craftsman as Shakespeare could and did employ preliterate devices in universally celebrated and unmistakably lettered works, the enduring

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[13] The sheer technical expertise of a late play like *The Tempest*, dated from 1611-12, is literally unimaginable in the earlier work.

importance and power of oral literature has been considerably underapprehended.

It is obviously true that "The man who could write a line like 'How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night' can never be called insensitive to the value and importance of the sound of words as well as their sense" (Holmes 1972:25). But to discuss the significance of rhyme in strictly and rather vaguely literary terms, as those few who reach the topic have tended to do, seems to me largely to dodge the issue (Holmes 1972:40):

> We used to be told that rhymed couplets were the signs of an early play, but the matter is hardly so simple as that. Sometimes they perform the same function as the poetical conceits just mentioned, or by their combined ingenuity and artificiality suggest an easy, leisured rarefied society . . . . In *Love's Labour's Lost* they give much of the dialogue the elegance of a dance, in *Richard II* they reflect at need the artistic philosophizing of Richard, the formal challenges and responses of Mowbray and Bolingbroke, or the dignified yet passionate appeals of John of Gaunt . . . .

To sum up this sort of thing, as Martin Meisel does (in a different context), as "the deliberate shift to a more heightened, formal rhetoric to achieve heightened intensity" (quoted in Holmes 1972:40), is I think in this context to fail fully to see what is in fact going on.

The Comedy of Errors

Let me begin with the early, unexceptional farce, *The Comedy of Errors*, its fairly mechanical plot derived from Plautus, its characterization distinctly minimal, and its poetic texture relatively so limited that one commentator has declared, significantly though not entirely accurately, that "Language, which regularly afterwards [in Shakespeare] is squeezed for its comic potential, here serves chiefly to keep us advised of situation" (Levin 1989:164). After a first act in which rhyme is used several times aphoristically—first to begin the play, then to end a scene, and again to heighten a comedic dialogue (Wells and Taylor 1986:293, ll.12-26-27; 294, ll.154-58)[14]—the second act opens with the two sisters, Adriana and Luciana, attempting each in her own way to deal with the differing rights and responsibilities of men and women. The first nine lines, in blank verse, move to a smooth and flowing beat. Beginning with line 10, the sisters engage in a kind of closely rhymed choral dialogue, interlarded with

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[14] I:2, lines 1-2, 51-52, 70-71.

moderately extended aphoristic speeches, a dialogue that extends for thirty-four lines and is only broken, first, after the appearance of their servant, and second, after one of the sisters, though still using the verse mode, changes back to the more swiftly flowing sort of blank verse with which the scene (and the act) opened. Here are the unmarried sister's final rhymed couplet and the married sister's blank verse line, spoken, now, not to her sister-in-rhyme, but to the servant (Wells and Taylor 1986:296):[15]

> Luciana: Well, I will marry one day, but to trie.
>   Heere comes your man, now is your husband nie.
> Adriana: Say, is your tardie master now at hand?

It is not hard to hear how differently the final line moves. The caesura, or pause, in line 1, comes after the third of the line's five poetic feet: "well, I/ will MAR/ry ONE/day" (or perhaps "one DAY") "BUT/ to TRIE."[16]   In line 2, the caesura comes after the second poetic foot: "heere COMES/ your MAN/ NOW is/ your HUS/band NIE."   These are more or less standard positions for the caesura in an iambic pentameter line.   But in line 3, the first blank verse line, the caesura comes at an unusual place, immediately after the first poetic foot: "SAY, is/ your TAR/die MAS/ter NOW/ at HAND?"   In other words, there is a kind of conventional metrical symmetry in the rhyming lines, and no symmetry whatever, but a flowing, speechlike utterance, in the nonrhyming line. These are of course deliberate usages: as a jazz critic once noted, commenting on a supposedly wholly improvised performance in which, all on the same beat, eight musicians not only changed to a new key but changed to the same new key, these are not matters which occur by chance. I suggest that Shakespeare's audience could hear all of these differences at least as well and probably better (considering how much more practice they had had) than we can, and that, far from being mere prosodic details, of interest only to pedants and poets, these were to them matters of automatic (if not exactly earth-shaking) significance. That is, having been thus signalled (prepared), they could and would now expect that, following on   Adriana's speech to the newly entering servant, for the time being there would be no more rhyme forthcoming. And, in fact, the servant begins his response to the blank verse line by speaking in the prose mode, in which mode both sisters then answer him; some ten lines further along, one of the sisters moves back into blank verse, in which mode the servant instantly joins. The blank verse

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[15] II:1, lines 42-44.

[16] Here and hereafter I employ the scansion marking used in Raffel 1992.

mode endures for something over twenty lines, and this time it is the servant who breaks it—moving back into the rhymed verse his two mistresses had been using before he appeared. Here are the four lines in which this latter change in mode is accomplished (Wells and Taylor 1986:296):[17]

> am I/ so ROUND/ with YOU,/ as YOU/ with ME,/
> that LIKE/ a FOOT/-ball YOU/ do SPURNE/ me THUS:/
> you SPURNE/ me HENCE,/ and HE/ will SPURNE/ me HIther,/
> if i LAST/ in this SER/vice, YOU/ must CASE/ me in LEAther.

I suggest that, with the symmetrical placement of the caesura in the first line, the audience's ears pricked up, automatically wondering (not consciously wondering: these would have been matters of half-subliminal convention) if rhyme was to follow.[18] Line 2, which scarcely pauses at all, seems to indicate that rhyme was not to follow. But line 3 once again turns rhythmically symmetrical, and this time line 4 follows suit, and the rhyme expectation is promptly satisfied. And then, the two sisters being alone again, as they were at the start of the scene, rhyming persists for the whole remainder of the scene, approximately thirty-five lines—the end of the scene being clearly signaled, and separated from what has come just before, not by a standard rhymed couplet but, still more emphatically, by a rhyming triplet.

What does this prove? Not much, as yet, though it is I trust a beginning demonstration. The next scene shows, I think, how truly deep the rhyming conventions run, and how deftly Shakespeare deploys them, and his audience responded, to their deployment. Beginning in blank verse, scene 2 does not use any rhyme for almost fifty lines (Wells and Taylor 1986:297).[19] After a single aphoristic couplet, "was there EV/er AN/ie MAN/ thus BEAT/en OUT/ of SEAson,// WHEN in/ the WHY/ and the WHERE/fore, is NEI/ther RIME/ nor REAson" (note both the interesting use of the word "rhyme" as well as the metrically extended meter), the scene then leaves off both sorts of verse, going for yet another fifty lines into a pure and uninterrupted prose mode.

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[17] II:1, lines 82-85.

[18] Barkan's rather condescending observation that "perhaps the tedium which . . . word-play inspires in a modern audience would be completely alien to Shakespeare's own theater" (1986:268) is I think distinctly misplaced.

[19] II:2, lines 47-48.

I believe Shakespeare's audience could plainly hear the difference, and my belief is bolstered by the way in which Shakespeare handles, first, the next transition in expressive mode, which is back to blank verse, and then, after another forty-one lines, the further transition from blank into rhymed verse. Here are the two lines immediately following the last in the prose portion; they are spoken, I suspect significantly, not by the servant, who has been one half of the prose dialogue just preceding, but by his master (Wells and Taylor 1986:298):[20]

> i KNEW/ 'twould BE/ a BALD/ conCLU/siON:/
> but SOFT,/ who WAFTS/ us YON/der.

Not only could the audience sense the difference in mode immediately announced by the first of these two lines, I believe, but they could also register the heightened, more poetic diction of the second line. And their ears as well as their minds would thereafter have been disappointed had the entering character, one of the two sisters, not continued in the verse mode thus audibly prepared for. And indeed she does, delivering herself of a speech, almost forty lines long, in wonderfully flowing, elegant blank verse.

Further, when at the close of her long, passionate, high-toned complaint, the speaker of this extended blank verse passage is answered by the man who is not, as she thinks, her husband, but her husband's long-lost identical twin, she is logically enough answered in the same mode she herself has employed. But his response is considerably shorter and, though it begins in blank verse, it soon signals to the audience, by means I will explain in a moment, that he intends, as he must, to reject both her and her noble words, for he knows quite well that he is not her husband. Note that "Ephesus" is the name of the city inhabited by this speaker's twin, and by the wife of that twin; she is addressing, all unknowingly, not her husband but her brother-in-law (Wells and Taylor 1986:298):[21]

> PLEAD you/ to ME/ faire DAME?/ i KNOW/ you NOT./
> in EPH/eSUS/ i AM/ but TWO/ houres OLD,/
> as STRANGE/ unTO/ your TOWNE,/ as TO/ your TALKE,/
> who EVE/ery WORD/ by ALL/ my WIT/ being SCAN'D,/
> wants WIT/ in ALL,/ one WORD/to UN/derSTAND.

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[20] II:2, lines 109-10.

[21] II:2, lines 148-52.

Line 1 is straight dramatic blank verse. Line 2, containing a choice metaphor, carefully uses that metaphor to highlight the word "two." Line 3 then makes a good deal of alliterative play on the /t/ sound that begins this word. I do not think such elaborate and extended alliterative play could possibly be accidental. The sequence "but *t*wo houres old,/ As *st*range un*t*o your *t*owne, as *t*o your *t*alke" is so replete with alliteration (I count four primarily alliterating consonants, and two more secondarily alliterating ones, for a total of six alliterating consonants in less than a line and a half!) that no amateur poet would ever stumble upon the effect, and no professional poet could possibly have thus stumbled. Moreover, having, as I believe, thus signaled a coming change to his audience, Shakespeare not only shifts into rhyming mode but carefully links the shift with what has announced it, as it were taking his alliteration with him: "Who every *w*ord by all my *w*it being scan'd,/ *W*ants *w*it in all, one *w*ord to understand." Again, five primary alliterating consonants in one couplet is not something that happens by accident.

What Shakespeare has been signaling, I believe, by these fairly wild alliterative bursts, is not the merely aphoristic or the merely scene-ending or the merely comedic signaling function of rhyme, but something quite different, namely—and, considering the couplet itself, not surprisingly—exactly the sort of wordplay that Professor Evans believes is hard to come by in this play.[22] I think Shakespeare's audience not only understood the signal, because this was neither the first nor the only time they had experienced it, but reacted to it, as say a race horse will to its rider's stretch-run signal, a flick of the riding crop, by automatically kicking their minds into a higher gear, putting on a burst of mental speed, the better and therefore the more satisfyingly to follow the mind-twisting couplet to which they would then be treated. And the likelihood of this interpretation is buttressed still further, I think, by the indisputable fact that, following this rhyming brain-bender of a couplet, it is the other sister who responds, and the mode *she* employs is straight blank verse, no rhyme occurring for roughly twenty lines. And then, after her sister's nonrhyming interlude, the frustrated wife breaks into aphoristic complaint, first protesting and then, with considerable force and courage, indicating that she will not be denied: "Come I will fasten on this sleeve of thine:/ Thou art an Elme my husband, I a Vine" (Wells and Taylor 1986:298).[23] The rhyme is distinctly emphatic, as it is meant to be. And with the exception of some

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[22] Bertrand Evans, "From *Shakespeare's Comedies*," in Levin 1989:164.

[23] II:2, lines 174-75.

half a dozen lines, the entire rest of the scene is then in rhymed verse, the end of the scene being signaled, as before, with a rhyming triplet.

The Taming of the Shrew

Or consider *The Taming of the Shrew*, almost invariably dated, like *The Comedy of Errors*, to 1593-94. The "Induction," or prologue, which begins in prose, in its first scene uses rhyme only once, as the kind of scene-framing device that aurally signals to the audience the conclusion of the first scene (Wells and Taylor 1986:32):[24]

> Haply my presence
> May well abate the over-merrie spleene,
> Which otherwise would grow into extreames.

The first act proper makes intermittent but largely unremarkable use of rhyme, employing it mostly to frame or set off aphoristic-like observations. The shrew herself, Kate, says that a maiden's "care should be,/ To combe your noddle with a three-legg'd stoole,/ And paint your face, and use you like a foole" (Wells and Taylor 1986:34).[25] Two lines further along, Tranio, servant to one of her younger sister's suitors, remarks, in an aside: "Husht master, heres some good pastime toward;/ That wench is starke mad, or wonderfull forward." A good bit later in the same scene, Tranio combines rhyme, aphorisms, and Latin: "If love have touch'd you, naught remaines but so,/ Redime te captum quam queas minimo" (Wells and Taylor 1986:35).[26] Lucentio ends the scene proper with what is very probably a rhyme, in Elizabethan English: "One thing more rests . . . :/ To make one among these wooers: if thou ask me why,/ Sufficeth my reasons are both good and waighty" (Wells and Taylor 1986:36).[27]

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[24] I:1, lines 137-38.

[25] I:1, lines 64-67.

[26] "Ransom yourself, a captive, at the lowest possible price" (I:1, lines 161-62). Though the quotation is from Terence, it is quoted, preserving the inaccuracy found there, from Lilly's *Latin Grammar*.

[27] I:1, lines 245-47.

In the next scene our gallant hero, Petruchio, slings rhyme back and forth in a spat with his servant, Grumio (Wells and Taylor 1986:37),[28] indicating that Shakespeare's use of rhyme in this play is meant to extend to comedic byplay as well as to mark gnomic wisdom, then casts a greeting to his old friend, Hortensio, in an aphoristic rhymed couplet employing, this time, Italian as well as English (the play being supposed to take place in Padua): "Signior Hortensio, come you to part the fray?/ Con tutto il core ben trobatto, I say" (Wells and Taylor 1986:37).[29] Some hundred lines further, Grumio uses rhyme in a metrically gait-legged aphorism: "KATHer/ine the CURST,// a TI/tle FOR/ a MAIDE,/ of all TI/tles the WORST" (Wells and Taylor 1986:38).[30] Petruchio speaks of himself in an aphoristic couplet (Wells and Taylor 1986:38);[31] he and his servant, Tranio, speak some more or less barbed, comical rhymed lines, ending with the rather predictable signal to the audience, via a rhyming triplet, that rhyming was about to be suspended—as indeed at precisely that point it is (Wells and Taylor 1986:39).[32] Furthermore, Tranio reinforces this suspension of rhyme—it is not here a scene- or an act-ending device, let me emphasize—by the emphatically flowing quality of the blank verse he employs: "Softly my Masters: If you be Gentlemen/ Do me this right: heare me with patience" (Wells and Taylor 1986:39).[33] That is, Shakespeare first signals with the rhyming triplet, then reemphasizes that cessation with this strong blank verse cadence—and his audience hears, and understands.

Nor should we be surprised, for though neither Shakespeare nor his audience were particularly aware of the fact, multiple signals are a basic component of all communication. To effect reliable, accurate communication we employ changes in pitch, in stress, in volume; we gesture; we alter verbal positioning and verbal rhetoric; and so on. "I'm going to the store," we say, and as it is supposed to, in a good declarative statement, the subject precedes the verb *and* the voice drops at the end. But to transform this declarative statement into a query—"Am I going to the store?"—we not only alter the position of subject and verb but also, this

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[28] I:2, lines 11-17.

[29] "Welcome, with all my heart." I:2, lines 23-24.

[30] I:2, lines 128-29.

[31] I:2, lines 101-2.

[32] I:2, lines 223-36.

[33] I:2, lines 237-38.

time, we end on a rising inflection. In a pinch, either signal could be used alone, and would probably carry the intended meaning. But human communication being as uncertain as it is, we like to avoid risks, employing more signals than we strictly speaking need.

Finally, after roughly forty lines in blank verse, the scene and the first act come to an end in one more macaronic couplet, this time in Italian and English (Wells and Taylor 1986:39).[34]

Before going on to the second act, which is of considerable interest in rhyming matters, let me in the name of clarity and brevity sum up what Shakespeare's use of rhyme seems to have been communicating to his audience in *The Comedy of Errors* and in this first act of *The Taming of the Shrew:*

1) rhymes will frame (that is, end) scenes and acts

2) rhymes will frame aphorisms

3) rhymes will emphasize comedic dialogue

4) triple rhymes will frame *either* the end of a scene or an act, *or* the suspension of rhyming

5) rhymes will frame high-order wordplay, which will be signaled by verbal extravagance like bursts of alliteration

6) the beginning and end of rhyming passages will sometimes be signaled by sudden changes in prosody

7) the beginning and end of rhyming passages will sometimes be signaled by sudden changes in diction

8) the beginning of rhyming passages will sometimes be signaled by assigning a speech to a character of markedly different social level

9) above all, no single pattern of any of the three expressive modes—prose, blank verse, or rhyming verse—will be allowed to continue uninterrupted: there will be signals that changes are coming, to be sure, but there will always be changes. The audience is to know that, placing themselves in Shakespeare's hands, they will not be bored.

Let me add, though we know sufficiently little about it not to be able to pursue the matter very far, that just as they could count on him, so Shakespeare too could count on certain things from his audience. John Porter Houston, after analyzing poetic rhetoric in the Renaissance and seventeenth century, notes that "sociological and geographical facts . . . influence the diversity of a language, and in Shakespeare's case the range and origins of the audience certainly had some effect on variety of

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[34] I:2, lines 280-81.

discourse. The pure courtier poet often tended to be limited in this respect in the sixteenth century, and some of the most original styles were created by writers . . . who did not reside at a court" (1983:124). That is, the wide range of social classes and levels of literacy in Shakespeare's audience was as important to him, in his practice as a professional playwright, as his own varied, non-aristocratic, non-university-trained background was important to them. We ought not to forget that such writers as Shakespeare and William Blake were able, as they progressed in their respective crafts, to break so many "rules," and to make so many poetic advances, precisely because of their relatively humble origins and "lack" of what was at the time considered a good education.

Blank verse and prose passages plainly constitute a much greater proportion of both the plays I have been considering than do rhyming passages. As mentioned above, in the first act of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare employs rhyme only intermittently, though he uses it fairly steadily, and he employs it only for limited, unambiguous purposes. But Act II handles rhyme differently.   For one thing, in Act II rhyme is not used at all for well over two hundred lines.   Since this is a play that begins in prose and continues to use prose at intervals throughout the first two scenes of its prologue and throughout the first act, it is also worth noting that these two hundred-odd lines are entirely cast in blank verse.[35]   What then is the audience to make of the intrusion of a sudden rhyming couplet, in which Petruchio speaks and Kate answers: "Nay heare you *Kate*. In sooth you scape not so./ I chafe you if I tarrie. Let me go" (Wells and Taylor 1986:42).[36] Let us recollect that, though still in blank verse, the forty lines or so before this couplet have been taken up by rapid bursts of repartee between the swaggering hero and the equally swaggering heroine. What the audience must therefore expect, hearing the rhymed couplet, is a swift change. The use of rhyme, here, plainly cannot signal the end of a scene, so the change must be either in rhetoric, form, or style—and when Petruchio promptly launches into a deft, smooth fifteen-line eulogy of his newly determined wife-to-be, the audience's expectations are surely satisfied. "I finde you passing gentle," Petruchio declares. "Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,/ And now I finde report a very liar:/

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[35] See Houston 1988:viii: "I have confined my observations . . . to blank verse, since rime . . . influences sentence structure to such an extent that any study which does not distinguish between the two kinds of verse will give a confused picture of the syntax of both."

[36] II:1, lines 234-35.

For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous," and so on, as this unusual wooer lays on his wooing with a very thick brush.

What then does Shakespeare do with rhyme?   He completely discontinues it for another eighty lines—which occupy a good deal more time in the saying than they do in the mere reading. Depending on the stage business employed, and the actors' delivery, it is thus some while before rhyme reappears. Does Shakespeare signal that reappearance? Petruchio first speaks two non-rhyming lines, the first of which, indicating his imminent departure, is broken into four heavily separated elements, the second of which, though it does not itself rhyme, suddenly drops into a rhyme-like symmetry: "Father, and wife, and gentlemen[,] adieu,/ I will to *Venice*, sonday comes apace" (Wells and Taylor 1986:43).[37] Either "adieu" or "apace," the two end-words of these lines, would be excellent rhyming material, but neither of them is so employed. But their use, plus even more importantly the rhythmic signal, allows the audience to anticipate the ringing rhymed couplet with which Petruchio then concludes and after which both he and Kate leave the stage: "We will have rings, and things, and fine array,/ And kisse me *Kate*, we will be married a sonday." Two things stand out, one plain even to our dulled ears, but both doubtless apparent to the Elizabethans' better-tuned ones. First, "*rings* and *things*" can hardly be an accidental use, at this point, of heavy internal rhyme. That this usage heralds still more bluntly the forthcoming use of rhyme seems to me extremely likely. Second, "we will be married a sonday" is in fact quoted from a popular Elizabethan ballad, composed by Nicholas Udall (1505-56), sung in the early play *Ralph Roister Doister* and very likely known to most of those in the audience.[38] For those who did know the ballad, the rhyme of "array" and "Sunday" would have been considerably reinforced.

Shakespeare then switches back to flowing blank verse, as Gremio asks: "Was ever match clapt up so sodainly?" But the response by Baptista, father of the two eligible ladies, at once suggests by its symmetrical rhythm, very unlike that of Gremio's brief speech, that still more rhyme is in the offing. "Faith Gentlemen now I play a marchants part," Baptista begins, following this line with a solid rhyme, "And venture madly on a desperate Mart." Once more Shakespeare leads his audience away from rhyme, as Tranio comments, "Twas a commodity lay fretting by you,/ Twill bring

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[37] II:1, lines 314-15.

[38] *Roister Doister*, act III, scene 2, lines 161-81. The play features many songs. See also Ault 1986:25-26.

you gaine, or perish on the seas." The first of these lines is flowingly asymmetrical, but the second is suggestively—and accurately, predictively so—in distinctly symmetrical rhythm. And once more the suggestion of rhyme, like some magical rainmaker, brings on rhyme itself, as Baptista speaks and Gremio answers, "The gaine I seeke, is quiet in the match./ No doubt but he hath got a quiet catch."

Having sounded his rhyme-word, Gremio clearly moves in a different direction, both in substance and in rhythm: "But now *Baptista*, to your yonger daughter,/ Now is the day we long have looked for . . . ." There is no time to pause for rhyme, when verse thus flows. But yet again, in Tranio's two-line response to Gremio's three lines of blank verse, though Tranio does not himself employ rhyme the rhythm of his second line strongly suggests it: "And I am one that love *Bianca* more/ Then wordes can witnesse, or your thoughts can guesse." Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, modern editors tend to use no punctuation in this second line, but the Elizabethan printer did use a comma. Was it his theater-going ear that so informed him? Or had the comma been marked in the copy from which he was setting type? There is of course no way of knowing, though the fact is suggestive. In any event, the rhythmic suggestion is immediately verified in the two lines which follow it—which frame not two but three spoken utterances: "Yongling thou canst not love so deare as I./ Grey-beard thy love doth freeze./ But thine doth frie." The next two lines continue to rhyme—and then, for sixty lines, until just before the end of the scene and of the act, there is no rhyme whatever.

There is an oddity here, too—if, that is, we let ourselves think that Shakespeare is capable of being as boringly predictable as lesser authors surely are. In the final two speeches, the first five lines in length, the second and last eight, the five-line speech ends with a rhyming couplet, but the eight-line one does not, employing rhyme medially in its fourth and fifth lines and, for good measure, rhyming by means of characters' names: "I see no reason but suppos'd *Lucentio*/ Must get a father, call'd suppos'd *Vincentio*" (Wells and Taylor 1986:44).[39] The heavy symmetry, seems not in the least accidental, involving as it does both a repeated and parallel use of the adjective "suppos'd" and also the ultimate symmetry of an actual father and an actual son—or at least their names. Like tends to attract and to be associated with like, and for English poetry rhyme is itself perhaps the ultimate symmetry. Oscar Wilde has been quoted as saying that rhyme was "the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre" (Preminger and Brogan 1993:1052).

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[39] II:1, lines 400-1.

I have been looking at a pair of early comic plays. Let me pursue, and conclude, my argument with an examination of two distinctly more somber-toned early plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and the play that follows immediately on its heels, *Richard II*.

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo begins with a prologue, spoken by a Chorus: it is a fully rhymed Shakespearian sonnet.[40] Did the audience know it was a sonnet? Perhaps some did, but probably most did not. But did they know it was fully rhymed? I would like to assume that, by this point, the question requires no answer. Nor should anyone be surprised when I note that, following on these fourteen closely rhymed lines, the play itself opens not with rhymed verse, nor with any verse at all, but in prose. The unexpected is what we must expect, in Shakespeare.

It is old Capulet who first changes the play's expressive mode from prose to blank verse: "What noyse is this? give me my long sword hoe" (Wells and Taylor 1986:380).[41] This is rhythmically distinctly symmetrical, but it is not quite a rainmaker; it does not yet bring down a flow of rhymed verse. But in the three lines that follow, spoken by Capulet's wife and again by Capulet, symmetry of rhythm is hammered away at—and when old Montague makes his appearance, so too, at last, does rhyme:

C's wife:	A crowch, a crowch, why call you for a sword?
C:	My sword, I say, old *Mountague* is come,
	And florishes his blade in spight of me.
M:	Thou villaine *Capulet*,
	[his wife holds him backe]
	hold me not, let me go.
M's wife:	Thou shalt not stir one foote to seeke a foe.

But with the entry of the Prince of Verona, blank verse becomes both more appropriate and what, in fact, Shakespeare turns to, first in the prince's twenty-three line burst of statesmanly eloquence and then for the fifty lines that follow. When, after those seventy-odd lines of blank verse, Montague

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[40] The prologue to Act II, again spoken by a Chorus character, is once again a fully rhymed sonnet.

[41] I:1, line 78.

at the end of a ten-line speech slips from blank into rhymed verse, there is no signal whatever, no audience preparation (Wells and Taylor 1986:380): again, Shakespeare's only true predictability is his unpredictability.[42] The six lines that follow after Montague's aphoristic couplet—"Could we but learne from whence his sorrowes grow/ We would as willingly give cure as know"—then remain in rhymed verse. The first of these three rhyming couplets belongs to Benvolio, Montague's nephew, who announces the imminent arrival of Romeo, Montague's son, about whose state of melancholy they have been deliberating. The second of these rhyming couplets belongs to Montague, and is spoken as he takes his leave. And then the third rhyming couplet, which is divided into a series of brief, introductory statements, belongs to the two younger men beginning their conversation:

> B: Good morrow Cousin.
> R: Is the day so young?
> B: But new strooke nine.
> R: Ay me, sad houres seeme long.

Romeo then speaks in a much more flowing rhythm, heralding the return to blank verse, which however does not reassume the kind of unbroken prominence it has by and large and to this point clearly had in the scene. Both Romeo and Benvolio, with each of them sometimes speaking half of a rhymed couplet, keep moving in and out of rhyme. Romeo's use of it is somewhat greater; of the almost eighty lines that follow on Romeo's rhyming comment, "Ay me, sad houres seem long," just over half are rhymed.[43] Thus Shakespeare not only flits back and forth between the two modes but, once more, he flits unpredictably. For example, the rhymed couplet, "Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighes, /Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers eies," is followed by the line, syntactically closely parallel to the second rhyming line, "Being vext, a sea nourisht with lovers teares," which however does not introduce yet another rhyme. Perhaps this is at least partly because the first, neatly balanced (parallel) syntactical structure is at once replaced by a different syntactical structure: "What is it

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[42] I:1, lines 157-58. A reliable indicator of the utter banality of Joyce Kilmer's poem, "Trees," is the absolute, deadening regularity (i.e., completely rule-dominated) of its prosody. See Raffel 1992:xxi.

[43] Lines 179-80, in most modern texts, make ambiguous a rhyme that is clear in the original spelling. The end-words "hate/created," in modern editions, obscure the rhyme that the end-words "hate/create," in the original spelling, make certain.

else?" begins the following line—and this does introduce another rhymed couplet: "What is it else? a madnesse, most discreete,/ A choking gall, and a preserving sweete" (Wells and Taylor 1986:381).[44] Shakespeare also uses the imperfect rhyme (*rime faible*) "is/this," constructs a sort of rhyming triplet out of the end-words "hit/hit/wit," and uses what may—the exact Elizabethan pronunciation is uncertain—be yet another imperfect rhyme, "poor/store" (Wells and Taylor 1986:381).[45] But the scene ends, more or less predictably, with a perfectly rhymed couplet (Wells and Taylor 1986:381).[46]

Nor are the intensely romantic scenes in this more somber play handled much differently. Romeo's first sight of and first meeting with Juliet is typical. The scene begins with servants, and is cast in the prose mode; old Capulet enters, and with this appearance of a socially lofty character the mode immediately shifts to blank verse, in which it remains without break for almost thirty lines. At this point Romeo sees Juliet, asks a servant who she is, receives the answer "I know not sir," and without any audience preparation bursts into a ten-line rhymed peroration on Juliet's beauty. Plainly, it is a desire to raise the rhetorical pitch to the highest possible level that leads Shakespeare to thus employ rhyme: note that the first six lines of the speech do not use the basically symmetrical rhythms common to less emotionally intense passages:

> O she doth teach the torches to burn bright:
> It seemes she hangs upon the cheeke of night:
> As a rich Iewel in an Ethiops eare,
> Bewtie too rich for use, for earth too deare:
> So showes a snowie Dove trooping with Crowes,
> As yonder Lady ore her fellowes showes . . . .

But note, too, that once Romeo passes from celebration to cogitation the rhythm turns to what is, for rhyme, a more conventionally symmetrical pattern (Wells and Taylor 1986:386):[47]

> The measure done, Ile watch her place of stand,
> And touching hers, make blessèd my rude hand.

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[44] I:1, lines 193-97.

[45] I:1, lines 184-85, 210-12, 218-19.

[46] I:1, lines 240-41.

[47] I:5, lines 46-55.

>Did my hart love till now, forsweare it sight,
>For I nere saw true bewtie till this night.

Can we imagine that the Elizabethan audience did *not* link this rhythmic shift to the rhetorical shift which accompanies it? They surely would have automatically associated this sort of rhymed verse with aphoristic language, just as they would have linked the rhyming of the first six lines to vastly heightened (and far more flowing) and more passionate language.

At this point, rhymed and unrhymed verse (the rhyming lines in couplet form) more or less alternate for another forty lines, and then, as Romeo for the first time speaks directly to Juliet, and she to him, Shakespeare assigns them a more usual love-poem mode—rhymed verse, rhyming markedly but more lightly, according to the pattern ABAB (Wells and Taylor 1986:386):[48]

>R: If I prophane with my unworthiest hand,
>   This holy shrine, the gentler sin is this,
>   My lips two blushing Pylgrims readie stand,
>   To smoothe that rough touch with a tender kis.
>J: Good Pilgrim you do wrong your hand too much
>   Which mannerly devocion showes in this,
>   For saintes have hands, that Pilgrims hands do tuch,
>   And palme to palme is holy Palmers kis.

By no means all Shakespearian wordplay is associated with rhyme. Some however *is*, as we have seen. And rhyme is regularly, over and over, functionally—that is, dramaturgically—associated with dramatic changes, with divergence, mutation, and the like. These are, as I have suggested, readily audible associations that serve the audience, and thus the playwright, as handy, readily comprehensible dramatic signals. That there is no single such usage to which rhyme is limited is in no way an indication of its non-functionality. Indeed, that very multiplicity of usage is in fact a powerful indicator, in these early plays, of rhyme's shifting but ubiquitous functionality.

One last example from *Romeo and Juliet*. In the fifth and final act, just before Romeo kills himself, and Juliet awakens to find him dead and kills herself as well, Romeo is confronted at Juliet's supposed tomb by her sorrowing "official" suitor, Paris. Having first directed his page to "stand

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[48] I:5, lines 95-102.

aloofe," Paris strews flowers and water on what he thinks is his intended wife's grave (Wells and Taylor 1986:409):[49]

> Sweet flower, with flowers thy Bridall bed I strew.
>   O woe, thy Canapie is dust and stones,
> Which with sweete water nightly I will dewe,
>   Or wanting that, with teares distild by mones,
> The obsequies that I for thee will keepe:
> Nightly shall be, to strew thy grave and weepe.

It cannot be said here that Paris' previous words have in some way prepared the audience or anticipated this rhyming speech, because between Paris' previous words and the ones just quoted there is a two-line speech by his page, employing a blank verse that provides no hint of impending rhyme: "I am almost afraid to stand alone,/ Here in the Church-yard, yet I will adventure." But Paris' *actions*, beginning with the solemn strewing of flowers, provide all the preparation his heightened, rhymed verse requires: stage situations, and stage business, are as valid as any other signals from playwright to audience.[50]

Not only are the first four of these lines not in couplet rhyme, being once again in the rhyming pattern ABAB, but the printer, apparently setting type "from Shakespeare's working papers" (Wells and Taylor 1986:377), has carefully indented lines 2 and 4—that is, lines that carry the B rhyme—much as if this had been a poem rather than a play. Shakespeare's "working papers" may well have indicated this spatial arrangement (all readers can of course see and understand it), but what of the audience? Is a visual indent on the printed page in any way relevant to the audience? Clearly not. But what *is* clearly significant, and distinctly audible, is the difference between a love- or funereal-poem rhyming pattern and an aphoristic couplet rhyming pattern. Not only could the audience hear, appreciate, and react appropriately to *this* difference, but they had audible confirmation from the playwright that they were indeed hearing what they thought they were hearing, for after four lines rhyming ABAB Shakespeare carefully (and without question deliberately) employs couplet rhyme in lines 5 and 6: "The obsequies that I for thee will keepe:/ Nightly shall be, to strew thy grave and weepe." Rhythm and rhyme are both changed, in these more symmetrical lines, from the four flowing lines that precede them. And with those changes come changes in rhetoric, in tone, and in purpose.

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[49] V:iii, lines 12-17.

[50] See Slater 1982:*passim*.

Rhyming lines cast in an ABAB pattern, that is, serve a different dramatic purpose—here, the validation of Paris' love for Juliet—from rhyming lines cast in a couplet pattern. The latter, as we have seen again and again, can serve many quite specific purposes; their purpose here is to aphoristically frame Paris' love validation.

Did *everyone* in the audience receive and understand these rhyme-carried messages? I do not know. But that everyone in the audience *could* hear and understand them I have no doubt whatever, and I strongly suspect that most in the audience did in fact do so—or Shakespeare's career would have been considerably less meteoric than we know it to have been.

Did Shakespeare *have* to use such rhyme-messages to convey aspects of his meaning? Of course not. The playwright's choice of expressive devices, to be sure, will be conditioned by other factors than merely his own predispositions, however those predispositions may have come into being. In Shakespeare's case, in these earlier plays, those predisposing factors include his comparatively slim theatrical experience, his comparatively modest reputation and standing at that time, as well as his desire to satisfy the audience's expectations, desires, and capacities. But Shakespeare *did* choose to use these rhyme-carried messages. Unless Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford wrote the lines we have been considering, or some unknown, jealous hand intervened to cob up and confuse the texts we have, these are the lines Shakespeare wrote, and wrote deliberately, and they are the lines with which he and his audience were apparently well satisfied. Our task is to try as best we can to understand their significance, not only for the plays in question, but for the nature of publicly performed dramatic literature in a transitionally literate age and also for literature in our own time, which—let me say just once more—is far more a mixture of literate and illiterate, of written and of oral, of lettered and of unlettered, than most of us like to think.

Richard II

Richard II, if not so subtle, mature, or stunningly powerful as, say, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *King Lear* (which come roughly five to ten years later: not a long span, as ordinary mortals are likely to accomplish such things), nevertheless marks a kind of dramatic turning-point.   As Harold Godard puts it (1960:I, 149), "Before *Richard II*, Shakespeare . . . occasionally confused imagination with 'imagination.' After *Richard II*, he seldom or never did." It seems never to have been as popular as others of his early plays (Bradbrook 1978:104). But as a good American poet, Mark Van

Doren, has noted, "the author of 'Richard II' is perhaps more interested in poetry than he will ever be again . . . . It is the work of an awakening genius who has fallen in love with the language he writes; who realizes the full possibilities of his idiom and scale; and who lets himself go" (1939:68-69). He does indeed. And we have a very good text, more than likely "printed from Shakespeare's papers" (Wells and Taylor 1986:413), so that we can be reasonably sure that what we have is what Shakespeare would have wanted us to have.

In this poetically almost riotous play there is, once again, an ongoing mixture of rhymed and unrhymed verse, without any admixture of prose. Low and high alike, king and humble gardener, speak at poetry's bidding. And King Richard, inevitably, speaks most poetically of all (Wells and Taylor 1986:432-33):[51]

> What must the King do now? must he submit?
> The King shall do it: must he be deposde?
> The king shall be contented: must he loose
> The name of King? a Gods name let it go:
> Ile give my iewels for a set of Beades:
> My gorgeous palace for a hermitage:
> My gay apparel for an almesmans gowne . . . .

But though this magnificent set-piece flows on and on, in blank verse as bright, passionate, and shining as hot metal, after twenty-five lines it too seems to have required, and to have received, the framing assistance of rhyme. There is no preparation or advance signaling, but as Richard modulates toward both the end of his lyrical outburst and the speaking of the ominous message, carried to him by Northumberland, "My Lord, in the base court [Bolingbroke] doth attend,/ To speake with you, may it please you to come downe" (Wells and Taylor 1986:433),[52] the purpose of Richard's long speech narrows, becomes more practical—and, not surprisingly, it is at precisely this point that rhyme enters (Wells and Taylor 1986:433):[53]

>   there lies
> Two kinsmen digd their graves with weeping eies:
> Would not this ill do well? well well I see,

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[51] III:iii, lines 142-48.

[52] III:iii, lines 175-76.

[53] III:iii, lines 167-70.

I talke but idlely, and you mock at me.

It is not only rhyme that enters, but punning, and wordplay, and alliteration, too: "*w*eeping/ *w*ould/ *w*ell/ *w*ell/ *w*ell." Do we find, both in Shakespeare's plays generally, and in this play particularly, punning, wordplay, and significant alliteration all used without rhyme? Yes—but that is, for better or worse, not what we find at this point in this play. It is the *presence* of rhyme-carried signals with which we have to deal, not the choice to use or not to use them. That choice was exclusively Shakespeare's. And he would not have employed rhymed-carried signals without some fairly clear purpose; he resorted to such signals, here as elsewhere, for good, sound dramaturgical reasons.

Moreover, once Northumberland has spoken the dreaded words, quoted above, politely but firmly directing the king to come down to "the base court" (both "court" and "base" constituting strongly evocative puns), Richard acknowledges both the words and their significance in a stunningly powerful six-line speech, the first two lines of which are in blank verse, the last four of which are all in couplet rhyme (Wells and Taylor 1986:433):[54]

> Downe, downe I come, like glistring Phaeton:
> Wanting the manage of unrulie jades.
> In the base court, base court where Kinges grow base,
> To come at traitors calls, and do them grace,
> In the base court come downe: downe court, downe King,
> For nightowls shreeke where mounting larkes should sing.

Richard flashes all sorts of word-play in this brief speech. Five iterations of "downe" over the course of the first five lines are anything but accidental, and "downe court, downe King" is plainly a reference to Richard's own fall. Nor is there anything accidental about the studied reference to the son of the sun god, Phaeton, hurled out of his father's runaway chariot and flung to the ground at the hand of almighty Zeus himself. Richard's equally studied insistence on the immense heights from which *he* has fallen, and the virtually obscene powers required to thus topple him, is still further emphasized by juxtaposing against those great heights the word "*b*ase," four times iterated, and by that reiteration providing, additionally, an alliterative echo to the iterations of "*d*owne" and to the four iterations of "court"—which word, again, is itself a pun on the physical location to which Richard is being summoned and the "court" where, as king, he has

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ruled. This alliteration is both reinforced and echoed by three iterations of
"*c*ome," as well as by "*c*alls," not to mention that, whatever the spelling may
indicate, "*k*ing" too alliterates with "*c*ome" and "*c*alls." The word "king"
occurs twice in these lines, and I much doubt it is accidental that the bitter
reference to "traitors" is sandwiched between two of these particularly
sharp-sounding /k/ alliterations: "*c*ome at traitors *c*alls." "Jades" is of course
primarily a word describing vicious, worthless horses, but though it is by
extension applied mostly to women rather than to men, one of the recorded
instances of the latter usage is in an even earlier Shakespeare play than
Richard II, namely, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Wells and Taylor 1986:39).[55]
The possibility of yet another pun—and puns are never very far to seek
anywhere in Elizabethan literature—is therefore a very real one here.
"Manage," though a word often applied in Elizabethan English to controlling
horses, had taken on the modern sense of "management" at least as early as
1581 (*Oxford* 1955:1197).

    Rhyme-carried signals in fact abound in this play; I will briefly
discuss only two more instances. In the last act, when the Duke of York has
loyally turned in his own traitor son, the new ruler Bolingbroke praises the
father's "aboundant goodnes," hailing York as the "loyall Father, of a
treacherous Sonne" (Wells and Taylor 1986:441).[56] York's seven-line
response begins in blank verse, but its first three lines insist on the
symmetrical rhythms of rhymed verse, and the speech ends with two
sorrowfully aphoristic rhymed couplets (Wells and Taylor 1986:441):[57]

> So shall my vertue, be his vices baude,
> An he shall spend mine honour, with his shame,
> As thriftles sonnes, their scraping Fathers gold:
> Mine honour lives when his dishonour dies,
> Or my shamd life in his dishonour lies,
> Thou kilst me in his life, giving him breath,
> The traitor lives, the true man's put to death.

But there is much, much more rhyme to come. The Duchess of York,
mother of the traitorous son, calls outside the door, begging admission.
Bolingbroke responds, "What shril voicd suppliant makes this eger crie"
("eager" then meaning "sharp, severe," rather than, as today, "appetant"

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[55] I:ii, line 248.

[56] V:iii, lines 64, 59.

[57] *Ibid.*:lines 66-72.

[*Oxford* 1955:577])? The duchess' answer rhymes with this question: "A woman, and thy aunt (great king) tis I." And then, for no less than sixty consecutive lines, all of them speak in rhyme—the king, the Duke and Duchess of York, and their finally forgiven son. When at last the royal pardon is spoken, and then repeated at the mother's insistence for good measure and for certainty, the father, mother, and son rise from their kneeling positions, and the duchess chimes the final rhyme in this long sequence—"A god on earth thou art," she exclaims to the king, the end-word, "art," rhyming with the end-word of his previous speech, which not accidentally just happens to be "heart."[58] Having just broadly relied on rhyme, Shakespeare drops it for the final speech of the scene, bringing it back only to signal the scene's end with a rhymed triplet, the first two lines of which are given to Bolingbroke, the last to the duchess (Wells and Taylor 1986:442):[59]

> B: Uncle farewell, and cousin so adue,
>   Your mother well hath prayed, and proove you true.
> D: Come my olde sonne, I pray God make thee new.

The juxtaposition of rhyme and wordplay, so strongly visible here, is of course something we have seen over and over again. It is not so simple to say precisely why Shakespeare presents this long sequence in uninterrupted rhymed couplets. Was this, indeed, a signal of any sort whatever, so far as the audience was concerned, other than the continuance of a mode the poet-playwright had for apparently better reasons introduced? I do not know, though it seems obvious that the *dis*continuance of rhyme, at precisely the point when the pardon has been first granted and then re-affirmed, serves as a framing device of structural significance. This scene-within-a-scene features a good many symmetrically balanced, couplet-style lines. But there are also rhythmically flowing lines, nor can I readily explain why we see either the one or the other. Is there no reason for sixty consecutive lines of rhyming verse other than Shakespeare's decision or desire so to employ the rhyming mode? That too is a possibility.

Richard's final scene is also the last to be examined here. For most of its length, it features wondrously flowing blank verse, with not a rhyming line of any sort until (a) Richard has well summed up his plight, first in solitary musing, then in conversation with one of his former

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[58] Word order and rhyme are somewhat confused at this point; this confusion is reflected in Wells and Taylor 1986, but is repaired, plainly correctly, in modern editions.

[59] V:iii, lines 143-45.

grooms, and (b) Richard's jailer enters, bringing the former king's food. Richard has the last words, in the almost one hundred lines of blank verse (Wells and Taylor 1986:443):[60]

> I was not made a horse,
> And yet I beare a burthen like an asse,
> Spurre[d], galid, and tird by jauncing Bullingbroke.

Is it the /b/ alliterations, two indeed in the final word "Bullingbroke," that signal to the audience that rhyme is coming? Or is it the entrance of a socially inferior character like the jailer? Or both? Again, I do not know—but can only point out that the rhyme that occurs at this point is in fact a triplet, which far more usually frames an ending than a beginning or anything in between. The first line is the jailer's, the second is Richard's, speaking to the groom, and the third belongs to the groom (Wells and Taylor 1986:443):[61]

> J: Fellow, give place, heere is no longer stay.
> R: If thou love me, tis time thou wert away.
> G: What my tong dares not, that my heart shall say.

Does this in fact signal that something highly unusual, or highly dramatic, is about to occur? The audience of course is well aware that something highly dramatic is indeed in the offing, for at the end of the previous scene Sir Pierce Exton has vowed (in rhyme): "Come lets go,/ I am the kings friend, and will rid his foe" (Wells and Taylor 1986:442).[62] Rhyme endures, after this anomalous-seeming triplet, for one brief exchange between the jailer and Richard; then Richard explodes in anger, striking the jailer, who calls urgently for help. Says the printed stage direction (reproduced from Shakespeare's "working papers"?): "Exton and his men rush in." Richard, roaring in blank verse, "seizes a weapon from a man," the stage direction tells us, "and kils him," and kills yet another before Exton, once more according to the stage direction, "strikes him downe." Richard has five more lines to speak; the first is in blank verse; the remaining four are rhymed couplets (Wells and Taylor 1986:444):[63]

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[60] V:v, lines 92-94.

[61] V:v, lines 95-97.

[62] V:iv, lines 10-11.

[63] V:v, lines 108-12.

> That hand shal burne in never quenching fire
> That staggers thus my person: Exton, thy fierce hand
> Hath with the kings bloud staind the kings owne land.
> Mount mount my soule, thy seate is up on high,
> Whilst my grosse flesh sinckes downeward here to die.

Exton's six lines end the scene; they are all in rhyming couplets. I wish I could explain that fact, and the almost more striking one that of the 52 lines in the next and final scene of the play, all but 12 are in rhymed couplets. Are all of these the kinds of closure signals associated with rhyme? Much of this sixth and last scene is aphoristic. The 12 lines not in rhymed verse are strictly functional, information-carrying stuff, and the whole scene is cast in an elevated, formal tone to which rhyme is of course apposite. Richard's death is well framed in rhyme, being in much the same tone. And perhaps that is explanation enough.

Finally, let me emphasize that I have not attempted to delineate the *etiology* of rhyme-signaled meanings in Shakespeare's plays. This is a complex issue, potentially of high importance; it should not be approached either in passing or in anything but the fullest possible detail. I have very deliberately confined my discussion to establishing, first, the existence of rhyme-signaled meanings in Shakespeare's plays and, second, their range and nature. Neither have I dealt with the equally important (and associated) question of the existence and nature of such rhyme-signaled meanings in the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries. This too is a large question, though perhaps not one quite so difficult, that also must necessarily be discussed elsewhere than in these pages.

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