

HAMLET TO HAMILTON

Season One, Episode Six *Whose Line (Ending) Is It Anyway?*

TEXTS

Text: *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, Kristen Linklater
(Chapter 8: Line-endings)

When you look at a page of a Shakespeare play you see that some lines run on until the margin stops them or until a paragraph ends; these lines are called prose. Other lines on the page are stopped, not on the margin, but because the iambic pentameter determines the length of the line...

There is, therefore, a vital discovery to be made about the place where the line ends in Shakespeare's verse. It is not arbitrary. It goes beyond the expression of poetic craft. The choice of the final words in the pentameter line is intentional and the actor who pays attention to how the line ends taps into a rich seam of acting information.

I owe a great deal to John Barton of the Royal Shakespeare Company for my understanding of how line-endings work and even more to his student Tina Packer, now Artistic Director of Shakespeare & Company, for her years of practical work on the text in the classroom and on the stage which rooted this understanding in the acting process and proved its application in performance.

(Prologue)

[Thanks] to John Hadden for inspiration on breath and line-beginnings...

(Chapter 8: Line-endings)

There is much controversy about the treatment of line-endings. I will offer my opinion on the subject, but you must practice, and apply whatever makes you a better actor. Do not abdicate your authority to "experts." Be open to experiment...

Text: John Hadden, The Shakespeare Forum [Facebook Page](#)

As several of you have said, we breathe before we speak. Barton is terrific, but if we breathe at the end of the line, it's a little like getting gas after the trip but not before. Watch people in life and you will see that when they are on a roll, their breaths are the inspirations, literally (spiro=I breathe)...

Text: *Modern Hamlets & Their Soliloquies*, Mary Z. Maher (Chapter 4: Ben Kingsley)

Kingsley talked about what happened in the rehearsal room, the beginning search for style and the honing of technical details. The cast worked very democratically, with open observation and discussion:

We were wondering what style to use, linguistically, whether we should break the text down into spoken idiom and do the lines with more colloquial grunts. To give you a terrible example, not that we would have ever one this outside of a rehearsal tactic, but we were being lulled into the area of "To be or not to be, I mean, you know, that's the question. You know what I mean, whether or not it is, like, sort of nobler in the mind..." There were the beginnings of that sort of thing from some of the more minor players in rehearsal who because they were in modern dress and so close to the audience didn't feel that the artifice of the language would be appropriate. But then, of course, the artifice disappeared and the *art* of the language became more prominent. And you realized that you could play with it much more easily than you could with any modern colloquial stuff. Polonius was doing it from the first week in rehearsal. The oldest actor in the company was word-perfect before any other actors and speaking at twice the rate and getting laughs from his fellow actors, the younger actors, in rehearsal! They'd look at one another and say, "Hey, what's going on?...He's brilliant. I like this, what's he doing?" They were slightly jealous. And then all that calmed down and we all listened to him and all discussed the acting style and I said, "Well, he's got it. Andre's got it." Bob Peck agreed, "He's the only one who's doing it, whatever he's doing."

Text: *Playing Shakespeare*, John Barton (Chapter 2: Using the Verse)

JOHN BARTON. Should you run on the line or not? Ask yourself that question and simply decide which feels better. Shakespeare gives you a choice. If it's better for you to run the line on, run it on. But if the verse actually helps you to phrase the line then that's the right answer. Personally I think that if you lift the word...at the end of the of the first line, it is quiet easy to take a small pause after it, perhaps a naturalistic pause for breath...

PATRICK STEWART. Now, John, there's one line there which runs on: "Thy mother plays and I/Play too..." What about that? Surely it's natural to run on there.

BARTON. Well, is it? You have to ask that question and then decide.

STEWART. It's possible to pause at the end of the verse-line and for it to sound natural and like spontaneous everyday speech. But if you pause here, it begins to sound slightly unnatural: "Thy mother plays and I...(pause)...Play too." And yet to stress it in that way might tell us something about Leontes.

Poetry: "The Hollow Men" by T. S. Eliot (Canto V)

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the shadow

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

Verse: *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare (Act V, Scene 2)

(Note: This is arguably either in mixed prose and verse, however it reads like repeated rhythm, with sprung beat—essentially, all verse in sprung meter.)

PHEBE. Good shepherd, tell this youth what 'tis to love.

SILVIUS. It is to be all made of sighs and tears;
And so am I for Phebe.

PHEBE. And I for Ganymede.

ORLANDO. And I for Rosalind.

ROSALIND. And I for no woman.

Verse: *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare (Act III, Scene 1)

HAMLET. To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep...

Verse: *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare (Act II, Scene 2)

ROMEO. But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

Verse: *The Winter's Tale*, William Shakespeare (Act I, Scene 2)

LEONTES.

Gone already!

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a fork'd one!
 Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I
 Play too, but so disgraced a part, whose issue
 Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour
 Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play. There have been,
 Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now;
 And many a man there is, even at this present,
 Now while I speak this, holds his wife by the arm,
 That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence
 And his pond fish'd by his next neighbour, by
 Sir Smile, his neighbour. Nay, there's comfort in't.

Verse: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare (Act V, Scene 1)

PUCK.

If we shadows have offended
 Think but this and all is mended
 That you have but slumbered here
 While these visions did appear

Verse: *The Mother of God Visits Hell*, Daniel Guyton (Act I, Scene 2)

(A heavy door opens. MICHAEL and MARY enter SATAN'S lair.)

MARY.

Hello? Is anybody here?

MICHAEL.

Nay, step behind me quickly, Lady, for I smell Beezlebub is near.

SATAN.

Well! Speak the devil's name, they say, and soon he shall appear.

Verse: *In Flight*, Jenny Lyn Bader (Act I, Scene 1)

MARTY.

Art, Sssh! (*Into phone.*) Hi!
 Long time no talk. I'm looking for a guy
 Who wrote for us. The poet with the hair?
 No, not that one. The one with less despair...
 And with the 50-volume epic work.
 Right, right, he also was a coat check clerk!
 His phone was disconnected? I'm sorry
 To hear it. Yeah, a typical story.
 And that was more or less how long ago?
 If you run into him, do let him know
 I have a job for him, with real money.
 Mm...What? You hadn't heard? I thought...that's funny.
 ...No, not a "poetry journal" in that...sense.
 (Embarrassed.) An...in-flight magazine. But it's...intense.

Lyrics: *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda ("My Shot")

HAMILTON.

And I'm not throwing away my shot
 And I'm not throwing away my shot
 Hey yo, I'm just like my country
 I'm young, scrappy and hungry
 And I'm not throwing away my shot

Verse: *The Lifted Instants Before the Fall: A Tale of Troy*, Becca Musser
 (Act IV, Scene 1)

CASSANDRA.

Please tell me I'm crazy...?

Please tell me my visions are nothing, please—
 Tell me this isn't real.

Everyone says they're lies and ravings...

That's it. I'm a liar. I'm crazy. I'm full of shit!
 Complete and total BULLSHIT! The wind will not blow,
 The gulls will not call, the rain will not fall, and you—
 And you will not [die.]

You won't.

ADDITIONAL READING

Jenny Lyn Bader

- [In Flight](#)

John Barton

- Playing Shakespeare [Book](#) | [DVD](#)
- Playing Shakespeare Episode 2 [YouTube](#)

T. S. Eliot

- [“The Hollow Men”](#)
- [T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays \(1909-1950\)](#)

Daniel Guyton

- [The Mother of God Visits Hell](#)

John Hadden

- Line-beginnings, on The Shakespeare Forum [Facebook](#)

Kristen Linklater

- [Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice](#)

Mary Z. Maher

- [Modern Hamlets & Their Soliloquies](#)

Lin-Manuel Miranda

- [Hamilton: The Revolution](#)

Becca Musser

- *The Lifted Instants Before the Fall: A Tale of Troy* (website forthcoming!)

William Shakespeare

- [As You Like It](#)
- [Hamlet](#)
- [A Midsummer Night’s Dream](#)
- [Romeo and Juliet](#)
- [The Winter’s Tale](#)

Tom Stoppard

- [Travesties](#)

Royal Shakespeare Center

- [Website](#)

Shakespeare & Co. (Lennox, MA, USA)

- [Website](#)

The Shakespeare Forum

- [Website](#)

Turn to Flesh Productions

- [Website](#)