

SCANSION AND SCORING

The following is the way this actor has chosen to scan and score Shakespeare's verse, preparing it for performance. It records:

- Division into feet |
- Irregular feet (trochee, pyrrhic/spondee) all other unmarked feet being iambs
- Hexameters HEX
- A short line
- Caesuras ||
- Enjambments ENJ
- Feminine endings
- Elisions (‘)
- One tetrameter (four feet, 8 syllables) TETR
- Highlighted antitheses
- Underlined catalogues
- Parentheses []

I noted also:

1. the extreme irregularity of this verse. While it is not prose, but verse, the verse form is clearly at war with the passionate long thoughts of the embittered Edmund. I want to exploit this tension between my two “mistresses” (metre and thought). The wild rhythms put the metre into extreme jeopardy, rescued only by reasonably long iambic sections, and carefully preserved line endings.
2. how the feminine-ending lines, especially if also enjambed, are like a river spilling over its banks – very actable! “Too much matter for the metre.”
3. that we even encounter two very rare *broken-backed hexameters*, each with an extra silent metrical beat.
4. the tetrameter, giving me my cue for a pregnant pause.
5. that this soliloquy ends with a short line, a powerful musical shock, but only if I can preserve the structure of the verse to that point, and not simply spoken it as prose.
6. how *legitimate* functions variously as either a three or four-syllable word with great dramatic effect.
7. the alliterating /b/ (base, bastard, brother, brand); and /d/ (doth, dull, tired, bed)
8. the mid-line *turn* in the tetrameter, prompting me to swiftly exchange my venom for ironic sweetness.
9. the overarching antithesis between the natural world (the world of bastards, who are fierce and strong and who worship the goddess) and the world of “civilized” custom (legitimacy, conformity, effiteness, dullness, and mediocrity, with its conventional masculine gods).
10. the effective use of *apostrophe* (addressing Nature; his brother, Edgar; and the gods) within the *soliloquy*. Another rhetorical figure used is called *epizeuxis*, repetition of the same word for effect - “base, base”. This particular use might also be termed *ploce*, a repetition with emphasis to bring out its literal meaning. Metaphor is so embedded in our language it is often hard to note its use as a rhetorical device in phrases like “brand they us with base” (no literal branding has

taken place), “plague of custom” (no literal illness results). Perhaps we hear *mimesis*, using the voice of others, in “bastardy, base, base”. The device called *parallelism* is at work in “my dimensions...compact...mind...generous...shape...true”.

My recording of the speech, following the scansion and scoring, may be heard at <http://www.paulmeier.com/edmund.mp3>

Thou, na | ture, art | my god | dess; || to | thy law ENJ
 My ser | vices | are bound. | || Wherefore | should I ENJ
Stand in | the plague | of cus | tom, || and | permit ENJ
 The cu | rios | ity | of na | tions || to | deprive | me, HEX
 For that | I am | || some twelve | or four | teen moon- | shines ENJ
Lag of | a broth | er? | || Why bas | tard? where | fore base? HEX ¹
 When my | dimen | sions || are | as well | compact,
 My mind | as gen | 'rous, || and | my shape | as true ENJ
 As hon | est ma | dam's iss | ue? || | Why brand | they us ENJ HEX²
 With base? | with base | ness? || bas | tardy? | base, base?
 Who, [in | the lust | y stealth | of nat | ure, ||] take ENJ
 More com | posi | tion || and | fierce qua | lity ENJ
 Than doth, [| within | a dull, || | stale, tir | ed bed,]
Go t' the | crea | ting a | whole tribe | of fops,
 Got 'tween | asleep | and wake? || | Well, then, TETR
 Legit | 'mate Ed | gar, || I | must have | your land:
 Our fa | ther's love | || is to | the bas | tard Ed | mund ENJ
 As to | the le | git'mate: || | fine word,-- | legit | imate! HEX
Well, my | legit | 'mate, || if | this let | ter speed,
 And my | inven | tion thrive, | || Edmund | the base ENJ
 Shall top | the leg | it'mate. || | I grow; | I pros | per:
Now, gods, | || stand up | for bas | tards!

[EDMUND, LEAR 1:2]

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¹ This line scans as a broken-backed hexameter with a silent extra beat, taking up metrical space, following *brother*. This is a very rare type of line.

² And again, another broken-backed hexameter.