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“Well-Staged Syllables”:
From Classical to Early Modern English Metres
in Drama

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi

Founded by Guido Avezù, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

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Confluences and Spillages: Enjambment in Elizabethan Tragedy and the Classics¹

Abstract

This essay aims at assessing how a set of confluences, bringing together classical dramatic and epic tradition, its sixteenth-century continental (especially Italian) reception, and vernacular practices, led to the development of performative effects in the use of run-on lines in English dramatic blank verse. A dearth of theorisation in the early modern period has caused scholars to overlook the deliberate uses of this device except for stylometric and authorship studies. The imitation of classical metres in *versi sciolti* adopted in both epos and tragic drama revitalised the practice of introducing enjambment for performative purposes. Enjambment was used and theorised in sixteenth-century continental poetry and drama as a marker of gravitas, and it can be argued that the Elizabethan poets and playwrights, besides imitating Seneca's use of run-on lines, came into contact with these continental practices which helped them develop their versification and impress their audiences.

KEYWORDS: enjambment; blank verse; Elizabethan drama; classical metres; gravitas

1. Premise: Performative Effects of Enjambment in *1 Tamburlaine the Great* 1.1

The revolutionary quality of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587-8) has recently been called into question, because many analyses tend to overlook the fact that "almost all drama written for adult professional actors before *Tamburlaine* is lost" (Syme 2013, 275), and because one can note "a relative absence of a clear Marlovian influence" (277) on companies such as the Lord Strange's Men in the early 1590s: "companies who staged [Marlowe's] plays did not instantly transform their entire repertoires to fit what may have been a new paradigm, but instead learned to orchestrate and cycle through an increas-

¹ This article is part of a research I carried out within the 2017 PRIN project *Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama* (Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Verona).

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ingly wide range of dramatic styles and modes” (276). On the other hand, to judge at least from his contemporaries’ comments and lampoons, Marlowe’s use of blank verse together with the “megaphonics” (Berger 1989, 65) which seems required for his texts to be performed, made a great impact. From what we know (and, it bears repeating, we do not know much), before Marlowe, the use of blank verse in tragedy, as initiated by Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc* (1561), seems to have had a complicated and intermittent run, with Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh’s *Jocasta* (1566) and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* by Thomas Hughes et al. (1587) being the main extant exceptions. And yet, little else apart from a sudden change in taste can explain why *Gismond of Salerne* (c. 1566) was recast into blank verse and printed in 1591 as *Tancred and Gismund* “polished according to the decorum of these daies”, as the title page reads, or why Lyly chose to write his last comedy, *The Woman in the Moon* (first performed probably in 1593), entirely in blank verse and not in his usual prose. But instead of dwelling on whether *Tamburlaine* was trail-blazing or not, let us read the opening lines of its First Part.

MYCETES Brother *Cosroe*, I find my selfe agreeud,

Yet insufficient to expresse the same:

For it requires a great and thundring speech:

Good brother tell the cause vnto my Lords,

I know you haue a better wit than I.

COSROE Vnhappie *Persea*, that in former age

Hast bene the seat of mightie Conquerors,

That in their prowesse and their pollicies,

Haue triumpht ouer *Affrike*, and the bounds

Of *Europe*, wher the Sun dares scarce appeare,

For freezing meteors and coniealed colde:

Now to be rulde and gouerned by a man,

At whose byrth-day *Cynthia* with *Saturne* ioinde,

And *Ioue*, the Sun and *Mercurie* denied

To shed his influence in his fickle braine,

Now Turkes and Tartars shake their swords at thee²

Meaning to mangle all thy Prouinces,

(Marlowe 1590, A3r-v, 1-17)

The above quotation reproduces the spelling and punctuation of the first edition (published in octavo in 1590); the punctuation did not change in any respect in the second (1593) and third edition (1597, except for a probable typo in l. 6, adding a full stop after “that in former age”). All three editions were published by Richard Jones, and while “the provenance of Jones’s man-

² “Thee” in the witness of the first edition preserved at the Huntington Library and reproduced by EEBO is illegible here (“th” is clear, but the other characters cannot be read).

uscript copy-text has been debated” (Bourne 2018, 117), the punctuation does nothing but strengthen a particular difference in the style of the two speakers. It is quite possible that Jones, his compositors, or prior scribes may have modified Marlowe’s punctuation: what matters is that the result is “an example of judicious rhythmical punctuation” (Ellis-Fermore 1951, vi). Mycetes, the King of Persia, speaks in evidently end-stopped lines: this may be observed by looking at the syntax, but also by paying attention to the typography. All of Mycetes’ lines are ended by a comma, a colon, or a full stop. Besides, apart from the trochaic rhythm of his initial words (“*Brother Cosroe*”) – probably to draw the spectators’ attention – all the rest follows a perfect iambic pattern. This uniformity ‘fixes’ his speech, making him appear stately, but also predictable. He himself states that he does not have the ability to make “a great and thundring speech” (3), unlike his brother, who, he sardonically suggests, has a “better wit” (5). Indeed, Cosroe’s style is markedly different: his first line ends with a very strong enjambment, with the verb (“*Hast*”, 7) postponed in the line that follows. His third line (“*That in their prowess and their pollicies*”, 8) cannot stand alone syntactically and requires to be complemented, again with an enjambed verb, an addition that runs into yet another enjambment (“*the bounds / of Europe*”), the line meta-poetically overreaching its limit.³ Other enjambments follow (see e.g. 14-15), and a string of alliteration (e.g. *prowesse, pollicies; influence, fickle; Turks, Tartars; meaning, mangle*, etc.) makes Cosroe’s denunciation of Mycetes’ weak rule more elaborate: tension is running high between the two brothers.

Marlowe employs a different style to express the division between the two brothers, and the fact that the speaker using end-stopped lines is the character accused of being weak may surprise, since Marlowe’s end-stopped ‘mighty line’ is generally associated with his (anti-)heroes. As Nicholas Brooke has remarked (a statement proved right by recent stylometric studies):

Marlowe’s effective use of this device may be clearer if we scotch an oft-repeated historical fallacy, that English blank verse was normally end-stopped until Shakespeare released it: it was not normally end-stopped in Surrey’s *Aeneid*, or in *Gorboduc*, or in lesser works, until Marlowe stopped it to contain the rhythmic splendour of [his] lines . . . (1960, 89)

Duffell (2008, 242) has calculated the erosion of ictus and enjambment in Elizabethan dramatic iambic pentameter and demonstrated that *Gorboduc* conspicuously features more enjambed lines than *Tamburlaine* and Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: the percentage of enjambments in the Induction, in

³ Compare the following similar passage in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (although we do not know which play came first): “Where Spain and Portingale do jointly knit / Their frontiers, leaning on each other’s bound” (Smith 2012, 1.2.22-3).

Sackville's portion and in Norton's is 12.3, 15.0, and 10.7 respectively, while in *Tamburlaine* it is 7.3, and in *Richard III* 8.3.⁴ Conversely, as is well known, Shakespeare kept transforming his style (see Tarlinskaja 2014 and McDonald 2006), and his late plays increasingly contain run-on lines (the percentage indicated by Duffell for *Antony and Cleopatra* is 21.0; see also Tarlinskaja 2014, 151-2).

We will return to these considerations, but for the moment, let us remark that, if the heterogeneity of dramatic styles in the period may prevent us from regarding Marlowe's blank verse as 'the' springboard of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean dramatic verse-making, it is clear that we are dealing with a playwright who is already in full control of his metre (although he changed several features of his versification over time: see Tarlinskaja 2014, 70-87), and who knows that enjambment can produce certain performative effects. How had this knowledge reached him? Laying questions of 'genius' aside, conventional observations include, for example, that, under the new conditions of professional theatre, Elizabethan and early seventeenth-century dramatic verse-making increasingly strove towards that ever-questionable category, realism (see Pangallo 2017, 164). It is true that enjambment can be connected to everyday speech, considering the nature of blank verse: run-on lines change the flow of the iambic pattern and may turn it into something more akin to prose. Yet, a few other factors may be at work.

Back in 1922, Tucker Brooke argued that "[s]o far blank verse had been a metre employed with increasing skill, but employed only when Englishmen were affecting to write like Romans" (188). Indeed, with the exception of Gascoigne's satire *The Steel Glass* (1576), the situation did not seem to have changed much from the uses of blank verse before *Gorboduc*, when the metre had been employed in Surrey's translations of the *Aeneid* (published posthumously in 1554 and 1557), in Nicholas Grimald's "The Death of Zoroas" and "Marcus Tullius Cicero's Death", based on two poems in Latin hexameters, Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* and Beza's *Mors Ciceronis* respectively (1557), and in Thomas Norton's quotations from the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics* in his 1561 translation of Calvin's *Institutio Christianae Religionis*. Let us compare Brooke's view with Sarah Wall-Randell's comment (quoting in turn Catherine Nicholson): "'Marlowe identifies the open-ended capaciousness of blank verse with aggression' and with barbarism, not with Classicism and control" (2020, 78): the 'blankness' of the verse, which could signal a rejection of medieval rhymed versification, channelling instead Greek and

⁴ Tarlinskaja 2014 (Table B.2) has used different criteria but has obtained comparable results (apart from the difference of run-on lines between *Tamburlaine* and *Richard III*): *Gorboduc* Acts 1-3 and Acts 4-5, 24.5 and 29.0; *Tamburlaine* Part 1 and Part 2, 15.0 and 13.4; *Richard III*, 11.8.

Latin quantitative verse, may seem at odds with the ‘bombastic’ quality attributed to Marlowe’s style in *Tamburlaine* (see Stagg 2021) and the play’s subject matter.⁵ Such statements generally reflect on Marlowe’s choice to re-fute rhyme in favour of blank verse, but one might argue that they also raise a few questions on the qualities of this blank verse. For example, can a demarcation between end-stopped and run-on lines in blank verse be traced in the context of the reception of classical metres and prosody? Peter Gibbard suggests that “[t]he late Elizabethan fashion for the sententious style was perceived as a reenactment of the corresponding stylistic movement in early imperial Rome” (2014, 319), and focuses on the use of (and vogue for) choppy, abrupt sententiae as well as run-on lines in Elizabethan dramatic verse. Gibbard’s argument is indubitably valid, but this essay aims at investigating a wider aspect: was enjambment considered a marker of classical style, specifically of a particular style found in classical epos and tragic drama, as mediated by continental critics and practitioners? In the next sections, it will be argued that this is indeed the case, which leads to another question: how did the adoption of enjambment, understood as a marker of *gravitas*, play out in Elizabethan dramatic blank verse?

2. Problems of Terminology and Classical Enjambment

Before coming to see what scholars and authors thought about enjambment in the sixteenth century, two interrelated issues must be addressed: the confusing terminological history around the definition of enjambment and the ways in which the device was used by the Greeks and Romans, with a focus on drama.

There is a marked “rarity of enjambment in popular and traditional poems” (Russom 2017, 33) in the English language before the modern period, and specifically, a “low frequency of enjambment in traditional English meters” (273), such as alliterative verse (and consider also Wolfgang G. Müller’s pronouncement: “Balladry is adverse to enjambment”, 1981, 234). Moreover, the first occurrence of the word “enjambment” recorded by the *OED* is as late as 1839. A quick search in EEBO TCP will also confirm that the rare verb to “enjamb” was never applied to poetry in the early modern period, but only in its original French meaning of “to encroach”.⁶ The French seem to have begun to use this verb in its poetical meaning in the second half of the sixteenth

⁵ For an alternative view, which looks at Ciceronianism in *Tamburlaine*, see Gibbard 2014.

⁶ Thus, Claudius Hollyband’s 1593 English-French dictionary defines *enjamber* as “to put his legge ouer some thing” (M2v) and Randle Cotgrave (1611) as “To stride ouer; also, to inroach vpon” (Hhijr).

century (see next section), while Italians preferred the expressions *spezzare/rompere* and, less frequently, *incatenare il verso* (break up,⁷ or chain the line).⁸ In a short section called “The Verse” appended to the 1668 edition of *Paradise Lost*, Milton had to use the elegant, but at the same time richly ambiguous expression “sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another” (A4r) to defend what he had attempted, and mastered, in his epic poem. Milton was “asserting that the music of his verse [lies] in its being in fact accentual-syllabic blank verse, and in its instrumentalized enjambments” (Hollander 1973, 203), which are often unpredictable, surprising the reader. He was looking at the Greeks and Romans, who were not bound by rhyme, the “invention of a barbarous [i.e. non-classical] age” (A3v), as he called it. Moreover, early modern authors were aware that enjambment was known and widely used by classical poets and dramatists: defective lemmatisation and theorisation should not be equated with a lack of technical awareness.

First, however, the terminological question ought to be further qualified. A viable definition of enjambment is the one suggested by Geoffrey Russom: “Enjambment is a mismatch between the syntax of a poetic line and our expectation that the line will be realized as a sentence” (2017, 19). Antonio Quilis’ definition and typology⁹ have enjoyed some critical favour but have also encountered opposition. To define enjambment, Quilis discarded the notion of syntagm and preferred to use the coinage of his master, Rafaél de Balbín Lucas, *sirrema*: a *sirrema* constitutes “una unidad gramatical perfecta, unidad tonal y unidad de sentido” (1964, 78; “a perfect grammatical unit, a tonal unit, and a semantic unit”).¹⁰ Enjambment occurs “cuando resultacen escindidos por la pausa versal los componentes de un sirrema” (184; “when the components of a *sirrema* get split by the line break”). This definition is prob-

⁷ Soldani (1999a, 268) notices the rather “inexact” quality of this definition (an enjambment does not cause any rupture in the two lines to which it pertains), but stresses the fact that *spezzare* or *rompere* demonstrates a clear perception of its contrapuntal effect: on the one side, it emphasises a breaking of the sentence (on the metrical level), on the other side, it signals syntactic continuity.

⁸ Contemporary scholarship keeps privileging the term “inarcatura” which evokes “arching” and “tension”, but it is essentially a misnomer. Fubini’s essential 1946 essay on the effects of enjambment in Tasso’s poetry has popularised it, claiming that it was used in sixteenth-century treatises, but no author of that period seems to have used it with this technical meaning (see Lomiento 2008, 16n9 and Menichetti 1993, 481).

⁹ Quilis (1964, 87-117) lists three types of enjambment: lexical enjambment (through *synapheia* across line breaks), *sirrematic* or infra-syntagmatic enjambment (where the nexus that is split is e.g. between an article and a noun, a verb and an adverb, a preposition and the interested noun, a noun and an adjective, subject and verb, etc.), and syntactic or propositional enjambment (when the enjambment occurs between a noun and an interested relative clause in attributive function).

¹⁰ All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

lematic because, for example, it does not account for structural differences in the syntax of different languages (Cremante 1967, 382 cites the example of compound tenses, the placement of which can follow different rules). John Hollander's notion of a "spectrum" (1973, 208) is more helpful, taking into account at one end the weakest forms and at the other the strongest.

Enjambment is usually discussed more in terms of syntactic linkages than semantic ones; this is perfectly appropriate as far as it goes, but leaves out of account the different kinds and strengths of expectation that may be set up by identical syntactic structures with different semantic contents. The relation between an adjective and a noun, for instance, will depend in part on whether it is a familiar or an unexpected collocation, whether the informational weight at this point of the poem falls on the adjective or the noun, whether the adjective-noun sequence comes within a semantic peak or within a semantic trough, and so on. (Attridge 2013, 38)

Andrea Acribo (2001, 167) adds that another problematic aspect is that an enjambment may be felt strong or weak depending on the historical context – that is, enjambment must be historicised: for instance, in sixteenth-century Italy, a few split nexuses which we would hesitate to classify as enjambments because they simply result from a syntactically complex clause, were considered in the same way as the strongest instances of this device. Maurice Grammont's early-twentieth-century notion of *rejet* ('reject', 'spillage') remains essential and will be used in this essay: "quand une proposition, commencée dans un vers, se termine dans le suivant sans le remplir tout entier, on dit qu'il y a enjambement, et la fin de proposition qui figure dans le second vers constitue le rejet" (1971, 24-5, "when a proposition, which starts on a line, ends on the one that follows it, without filling it completely, then that is enjambment, and the end of the proposition which appears in the second line constitutes the *rejet*"). Finally, enjambment can produce various effects, and it would be naïve to think that any instance of this device may be reduced to a specific function (Menichetti 1993, 502): some scholars have attempted to catalogue all such functions, such as Henri Morier (1975, 408-13), who lists enjambments *de force*, *d'attente*, *de malice*, *de deçu*, *de charme*, etc. In fact, it is much more a question of context and co-text and specifically, in the case of play-texts, of dramatic situation.¹¹

The ancient Greeks and Romans did not have a term for enjambment, except for the specific case of *episynaloephe*, the elision of a vowel at the end of a line before a vowel beginning the next, which is commonly found in Sophocles (hence its other name, *eidōs sophokleion*), Menander, and Hellen-

¹¹ See Pangallo 2012, 106n24: "Metrical variations in dramatic verse undeniably affect the performance of the text, but they only carry meaning in their relationship to the context within which they occur".

istic dactylic hexameters (Lomiento 2008, 19).¹² By differentiating between metrico-rhythmical *cola* (the metrical units of the verse) and rhetorical *cola* (the linguistic units), the Greeks had understood the substantial difference between the rhetorical level of poetic discourse (determined by grammar and semantics) and that of lyric discourse (determined by sound, metre, and rhythm) (ibid.). The most significant critical testimony to one of the ways in which they used it can be found in Chapter 26 of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων* (*The Arrangement of Words*) (before 7 CE):

Concerning melodious metrical composition which bears a close affinity to prose, my views are of the following kind . . . He who wishes to succeed in this department must change the words about and connect them with each other in manifold ways, and make the clauses begin and end at various places within the lines, not allowing their sense to be self-contained in separate verses, but breaking up the measure . . . for an elastic treatment of rhythms and metres seems to bring verse quite near to prose. Now those authors who compose in epic or iambic verse, or use the other regular metres, cannot diversify their poetical works with many metres or rhythms, but must always adhere to the same metrical form. But the lyric poets can include many metres and rhythms in a single period. So that when the writers of monometers break up the lines by distributing them into clauses now one way now another, they dissolve and efface the regularity of the metre; and when they diversify the periods in size and form, they make us forget the metre. (Roberts 1910, 271-3)

According to Dionysius, whereas lyric poets can employ a great variety of metres, those working only with iambic trimeters (Dionysius later cites Euripides) or hexameters (Homer *in primis* – see Parry 1929 and Kirk 1985, 30-7) can vary their work by “breaking up the measure” (διατέμνοντα τὸ μέτρον) and juxtapose *cola* of different lengths, without adapting the sentence to the metrical measure (see Dainotti 2012, 15-16). It is worth remarking that this breaking up of measures was thought as having the effect of making poetry close to prose (on similar considerations by Gorgias and Isocrates, see Dainotti 2021, 11). In both comic and tragic drama, enjambment was used, apart from specific expressive purposes, to favour the natural flow of the phrasing, making it closer to spoken language and prose, often in narrative segments (Lomiento 2008, 21; see also Prato 1970 and Perusino 2008). Sophocles adapted the technique to the solemnly noble diction of his dramatis per-

¹² In the Middle Ages, Bede and others used the term *concatenatio* (see Menichetti 1993, 499); see Bede's *De Arte metrica* 11.2: “in exámetro carmine concatenatio versuum plurimorum solet esse gratissima” (“in a poem written in hexameter, the concatenation of several lines usually proves most delightful”).

sonae (Fileni 2008, 81), and while most scholars lament the impossibility of fully recovering the performative modalities of enjambment in Greek drama (82), Battezzato (2008, 82-101) has shown that the frequency of enjambments can signal, among other things, the particular ‘phonostyle’ conditioning (or characterising) each tragedian. Maria Grazia Fileni has argued that enjambments can also appear in ‘focal points’ of the drama, emphasising data that are functional to an immediate understanding of the scenic event or crucial ideological motifs (2008, 95). Even in Aeschylus, who uses enjambment much more sparingly, such effects are present. For example, as argued by Adele Filippo and Rosanna Guido (1981, 85-6), when Queen Atossa narrates her dream in *Persians* 181-7, the sinuous flow of her speech presents a heightened moment of tension at 185:

ἔδοξάτην μοι δύο γυναῖκ' εὐείμονε,
 ἡ μὲν πέπλοισι Περσικοῖς ἡσκημένη,
 ἡ δ' αὖτε Δωρικοῖσιν, εἰς ὄψιν μολεῖν,
 μεγέθει τε τῶν νῦν ἐκπρεπεστάτα πολύ,
 κάλλει τ' ἀμώμω, καὶ κασιγνήτα γένους
 ταύτοῦ: πάτραν δ' ἔναιον ἡ μὲν Ἑλλάδα
 κλήρω λαχοῦσα γαῖαν, ἡ δὲ βάρβαρον.
 (Aeschylus 1926)¹³

γένους / ταύτοῦ (of the same family) emphasises the consanguinity between the two figures (conventionally interpreted as Europe and Asia), a fraught theme within this patriotic play.¹⁴

If one finally considers Seneca, the tragedian who influenced early modern tragedy the most, one notices that he made his Greek models’ use of enjambment his own, as well.¹⁵ For example, in *Hercules Furens*, Juno tries

¹³ In Herbert Weir Smyth’s prose translation: “I dreamed that two women in beautiful clothes, one in Persian garb, the other in Dorian attire, appeared before my eyes; both far more striking in stature than are the women of our time, flawless in beauty, sisters of the same family. As for the lands in which they dwelt, to one had been assigned by lot the land of Hellas, to the other that of the barbarians”.

¹⁴ Comparable functions have been detected also in Plautus and Terence’s comedies (see Dunkel 1996 and Danese 2008), where enjambment can strengthen the effect of *aprosdoketon* (Raffaelli 2008, 146), the unexpected ending of what nowadays would be called humorous gags.

¹⁵ In an influential 1981 article, John G. Fitch has suggested that the frequency of sense-pauses, including those produced by enjambment, can be of help to date his tragedies. However, Danckaert usefully reminds us of an editorial danger (2013, 41): “the reader’s interpretation is at least to some extent influenced in quite an illegitimate way when the number of enjambments in a text is artificially increased by adding an ill-justified colon-division (all modern Seneca editions, the medieval manuscripts included).”

to make us as upset as she is at Hercules' success by enjambling "spolia . . . patri / fraterna" (51-2), foregrounding the absurdity of a father rejoicing in his child's triumph over his uncle:

vidi ipsa, vidi nocte discussa inferum
 et Dite domito spolia iactantem patri
 fraterna, . . .
 (Seneca 1921, ll. 50-2)

I saw with my own eyes hell with its darkness dashed aside
 and with Pluto subjugated he boasts to his father: spoils
 fraternal! . . .
 (Gunderson 2015, 133-4)

Seneca was following the Greeks, but also channelling Virgil (see Trinacty 2014): in similar descriptions and narrative sections, "Seneca's hyper-epicizing . . . aims at turning the listener (and reader) into a virtual eyewitness by means of vivid evocation . . . and enhanc[ing] . . . emotive power" (Baertschi 2015, 186). Virgil, in his *magnum opus*, managed to avoid metrical monotony and rhythmic uniformity also by employing enjambment more than any of his predecessors. His 'necessary enjambments' (Parry 1929, 23) are placed together with others marked by a *rejet* in the first dactyl or, more rarely, a molossus (a foot of three long syllables), which produces variety and complexity (see Cupaiuolo 1963, 48). A particularly frequent enjambment type is the one that isolates the verb of the main clause *en rejet*, and Fabio Cupaiuolo (1963, 49) notices that many such instances in Book 4 are emotionally connoted, because such isolated actions are performed almost exclusively by Dido or Aeneas. On the other hand:

Naturally the frequency of internal pauses in the hexameter is accompanied by enjambment, which pushes the emotional thrust of phrases beyond the limits of the metrical unit . . . A strict coincidence of hexameter and unit of sense, and the elimination of strong internal pauses within the line, were formal achievements of the *neoteroi* in opposition to the liberty of archaic Roman poetry; Virgil renounces this smooth and polished uniformity since it would prove inadequate to express new dramatic contents. (Barchiesi 2017, 99)

In the next section, it will be seen that the Renaissance was keen on re-discovering and taking stock of the classics' manifold and complex uses of enjambment, the effects of which were deployed through such cross-fertilisation between epos and drama

3. Classical Enjambment and *Gravitas* According to the Italians

Some scholars still doubt the influence of Italian *versi sciolti* on the development of English blank verse, regarding the latter as a “a product of strictly English humanism” (Hartman 1933, xxvi), but it seems very likely that Luigi Alamanni’s and other Italians’ rhymeless experimentations were among the books read in France by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the inventor of this “straunge metre” (as reads the titlepage of the 1554 edition of his translation of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*).¹⁶ Such texts circulated widely at the French court and “[t]he extent of Surrey’s borrowing from the Italian texts . . . is enough to demonstrate” the exemplarity of such a model for the creation of English blank verse (Sessions 1999, 279). John M. Steadman usefully points out that in early modern England poetic practice very often preceded, or, in fact, pre-empted theorisation.

The first English examples of blank verse were likewise indebted largely to Italian precedent rather than to theory. Surrey’s translations from the *Aeneid* belong to the same tradition as those by Cardinal Hippolito de Medici, Nicolò Liburnio, and others. The blank verse of Gascoigne’s *Jocasta* is a carry-over from Dolce’s drama. More than a century later, in justifying his own “English Heroic Verse without Rime”, Milton appealed significantly to the precedent of poets rather than theorists. (1964, 384-5)

As for drama, it seems very probable that Sackville and Norton looked abroad for examples of rhymeless tragedy in vernacular, and specifically, cast their gaze towards Italy, because before 1561, the year of *Gorboduc*, all tragedies written in French or Spanish either employed rhyme or, less frequently, were written in prose. Contrariwise, ever since Trissino’s *Sofonisba* (written around 1514-1515, first published in 1524), virtually all¹⁷ Italian ‘regular’ tragedies (i.e. modelled on those of the ancient Greeks and Romans) were written in rhymeless hendecasyllables (sometimes in combination with rhymeless seven-syllable lines – not considering the variety of metres employed in the choruses). In the preface to his *Sofonisba*, Trissino had been clear why rhyme should not be used if one wants to move the audience and imitate the classics:

E lo [i.e. tal numero] vederà non solamente ne le narrazioni, et orazioni utilissimo, ma nel muover compassione necessario; Perciò che quel sermone

¹⁶ When his translation of the second book was published in 1557, the “straunge metre” was renamed “English metre”.

¹⁷ There are a couple of exceptions, such as Del Carretto’s *Sofonisba* (pr. 1546) which is in *ottava rima*.

il quale suol muover questa, nasce dal dolore, et il dolore *manda fuori non pensate parole*, onde la rima, che pensiero dimostra, è veramente a la compassione contraria. (1529, a3v, emphasis mine)

[And you will see that such a metre is not only very useful for narrations and orations, but it is also necessary to move to pity, because that speech which usually elicits it takes its origin from pain, and pain *draws out unthought words*, hence rhyme, which entails thinking, truly opposes pity.]

While these circumstances are fairly well known to scholars, the functions and effects attributed to enjambment in the sixteenth century may be a less familiar subject, despite the fact that the continental Renaissance has been called “the highest moment of [critical] reflection on enjambment, mainly *a parte subiecti*, or rather, *auctoris*” (Robaey 2008, 235, my translation). While it is unlikely that the Italian poetic treatises were read by many Elizabethans, they cast a light on the practices of those Italian poets and dramatists with whose works they could come into contact or, at the very least, explain what ideas circulated on the continent on the use of run-on lines. Playwright Leone de’ Sommi (d. 1590) provides the clearest statement in his *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*:

... et apresso devrebbe *usar deligenza in non fare che il fine d’ogni sentenza andasse sempre a finire nel fin del verso, per non cadere in quella severa locuzione et in quella noiosa rissonanza, che nelle comedie è già dannata, et nelle tragedie sarebbe noiosissima*; perché *lo scavezzar sovente i versi* (ma che restino però armoniosi et leggiadri), oltra che par che le dia sempre più *de l’altiero et del grave*, se ne trae anco questo utile: che, nel recitarli, vi resta la facilità della prosa, la quale, mista con la maestà del verso, riesce oltre modo gioconda et graziosa; et questo dico perché, essendo il fine delle tragedie, come anco delle comedie, il deversi non solamente legger su i libri, ma appresentarsi anco in scena, bisogna che il poeta abbia giudicio nell’introdur cosa et descriverla, in modo che riesca con gli effetti et con le parole non meno. (de Sommi 1968, 22, emphasis mine)

[... the poet should *be careful and avoid that the end of each sentence should match the end of the line, so as not to incur that severe way of speaking and that displeasing resonance, which is already a damned thing in comedies, and which would be very displeasing in tragedies*. This happens not only because *the frequent breaking up of the lines* (as long as they remain harmonious and graceful) seems to endow them with *heightened majesty and seriousness*, but also because it entails a further expediency: when you recite them, they remain as facile as prose, and this facility, joined with the majesty of the verse, proves exceedingly delightful and charming. I say this because, since the final nature of tragedies (as well as that of comedies) resides in not being read in books, but in being staged, the poet must be judicious in the introduction and description of something, because effects as well as words must prove successful.]

De Sommi shows himself acutely aware of the performative dimension of play-texts and argues that enjambment (“scavezzar . . . i versi”) should be privileged because it avoids sententiousness, “displeasing resonance”, and accords instead “de l’altiero et del grave”, that is, a quality pertaining to the elevated style and *gravitas* (notice that the two substantivised adjectives in the Italian verge on hendiadys). Before coming to the use of enjambment in *versi sciolti* epic poetry and drama, let us compare de Sommi’s statement with what Girolamo Ruscelli wrote about the ‘breaking up of lines’ in sonnets in his often-republished *Trattato del modo di comporre in versi della lingua italiana*, a copy of which lay on the shelves of the Sidneys’ library in Penshurst Place (see Warkentin, Black and Bowen 2013, 18):

. . . si son fatti à creder, e l’hanno anco scritto, che è vitio il rompere il verso per finir la sentenza . . . Mettono costoro nel Sonetto per vitio quello, che è una delle vie principali da procurar l’altezza, e la leggiadria dello stile. Percioche *si come si vede fatto da i Latini nelle cose Eroiche*, lo spezzar così il verso, e quivi venir’ a finir la costruzione della sentenza, è la principal grandezza dello stile. Et in *Virgilio può ciascuno certificarsene à voglia sua* . . . (1559, cxliv-cxlv, emphasis mine)

[. . . they have been led to believe, and so write too, that it is bad if one breaks up the line to finish the sentence . . . These authors attribute a fault to what, in the sonnet, is one of the main ways to achieve loftiness and gracefulness of style. Indeed, *as one can see in the heroic works by the Latins*, such breaking up of lines and then ending the construction of one’s sentence is the chief greatness of style. *Let anyone who wishes to find confirmation of this practice read Virgil* . . .]

Like de Sommi, Ruscelli associates enjambment with *gravitas* and regards it as a defining feature of the elevated style typical of epic poetry. Andrea Afribo is the scholar who has worked most extensively on the theorisations of *gravitas* in sixteenth-century Italian poetry and has investigated a literary *querelle* which engaged many Italian authors of the sixteenth century, the century in which enjambment was one of the subjects that came to dominate Italian critical discourse and literary practice.¹⁸ Afribo (2001, 167-200) shows that, on the one hand, intellectuals such as Torquato Tasso and Antonio Minturno advocated the use of enjambment together with *ordo difficilis* (e.g. through the use of hyperbaton or anastrophe) and long sentences to achieve a classically elevated style. Tasso significantly wrote that the “composizione . . . avrà del magnifico se saranno lunghi i periodi . . . S’accrece la magnificenza con l’asprezza, la quale nasce . . . da rompimento de’ versi”

¹⁸ It has been estimated, for instance, that the then hugely influential “Della Casa used [enjambment] more than any previous poet in Italian” (Prince 1954, 18).

(1959, 399, “the composition . . . will have a magnificent quality if its clauses are long . . . This magnificence can be increased through harshness, which is born . . . out of the breaking up of lines”).¹⁹ On the other, their adversaries, followers of Pietro Bembo such as Girolamo Muzio, believed that vernacular poetry and drama should aim at clarity, which cannot be achieved “strascinando per forza le parole” (quoted in Afribo 2001, 171, “dragging around the words by force”). Minturno assured these critics that *gravitas* can produce “dolcezza” (Afribo 2001, 173, “smoothness”), and Tasso believed that true poetry can only be the one in which “il senso . . . sta largamente sospeso” (Tasso 1597, 130, “the sense . . . is lengthily suspended”), because “il rompimento de’ versi ritiene il corso dell’oratione, ed è cagione di tardità, e la tardità è propria della gravità, però s’attribuisce à i magnanimi” (Tasso 1582, 380, “the breaking up of the lines retains the flow of the speech, and causes tardiness, and tardiness belongs to *gravitas*, that is why it is attributed to the large-souled”).²⁰ Della Casa and Tasso had evidently been struck by this passage of Demetrius of Phalerum’s *De Elocutione* as edited by Piero Vettori: “Magnificum autem est, et ex circumductu in componendo dicere” (Vettori 1562, 46; in Roberts’ 1902 translation, “Elevation is also caused by a rounded form of composition”) and interpreted it as if Demetrius had been dealing specifically with enjambment (Cremante 1967, 385). In fact, in this passage Demetrius was dealing with prose (he quotes Thucydides), but immediately before this, he had written that “[t]he iambic measure lacks distinction and resembles ordinary conversation” (Roberts 1902, 93): Renaissance poets may have decided to increase the number of enjambments not only to make their verses flow more ‘naturally’, but also to make them more elevated.

It is interesting to see that enjambment became associated with a classically elevated style not just in Italy, but also in Spain and France. Fernando de Herrera, commenting on Garcilaso’s style, wrote (basically paraphrasing Ruscelli) that enjambment is “uno de los caminos principales para alcançar l’alteza i hermosura del estilo; como en el Eroico latino, que romper el verso es grandeza del modo de dezir” (Herrera 1580, 68-9, “one of the main ways to achieve loftiness and beauty of style, as in Latin heroic works, where breaking up the line is greatness in the manner of speaking”). According to Cremante, Herrera was recapitulating

opinions which were by then widely known, and on which scholarship, in Italy and in France, had been meditating for a few decades, especially in or-

¹⁹ Elsewhere, Tasso reiterates the concept: “I versi spezzati, i quali entrano uno ne l’altro . . . fanno il parlar magnifico e sublime” (1959, 664, “broken-up verses, which interpenetrate each other . . . make the speech magnificent and sublime”).

²⁰ On the role in Tasso’s poetics of enjambment as a device generating pathos, see Fubini 1946. For a more recent and technical evaluation, see Soldani 1999a, 267-95.

der to comment on lyrical experimentations which aspired to – and aimed at – assimilating to the hackneyed Petrarchist texture . . . a more evident and pronounced classicistic surface. (1967, 384-5, my translation)

The French used enjambment abundantly in their alexandrines before Malherbe's strict *diktat* at the beginning of the 1600s (Žirmunskij 1972, 191),²¹ and Ronsard significantly wrote in the preface to *La Franciade* that, in employing them, he was following the classics: "J'ay esté d'opinion, en ma jeunesse que les vers qui enjambent l'un sur l'autre, n'estoient pas bons en nostre Poesie: toutefois j'ay cognue depuis le contraire par la lecture des bons Autheurs Grecs et Romains" (1592, 3.18; "When I was young, I thought that lines enjambling on each other could not be good in our poetry: however, I realised that the opposite is the case after reading the good Greek and Roman authors"). This passage is especially emblematic because it features what seems the first occurrence of the verb *enjamber* in this meaning (Cremante 1967, 3852n14).

The previous observations pertained to all kinds of vernacular poetry, but especially those employing rhyme. What about enjambment in *versi sciolti*? Trissino, who revered the Greeks and studied Aldo Manuzio's editions of Sophocles and Euripides,²² believed that *versi sciolti* should be employed also because he felt that rhyme was an unsurmountable hindrance to the classical features of enjambment: rhyme is "totalmente contraria alla continuatione della materia, e concatenatione de i sensi, e de le costruttioni" (1562, Giv, "totally contrary to the continuity of the matter, and the concatenation of meanings and constructions"; see Placella 1969, 145 and Hardison 1984, 260). Minturno even went so far as to regard enjambment as the ideal device which can lend beauty to the *gravitas* of the *sciolti*:

[è] di non poco artificio il saperli ben catenare con voci diverse hor lunghe, hor brevi. Di che nasce una varietà bellissima di numeri *con grandissimo diletto de gli orecchi: sì comede' [sic] varij piedi nella oration latina*. Ma non accorgendosene gli uomini volgari dati a versificare, in ogni verso chiudon la sentenza . . . Doversi havere molta cura; che, quanto elle sciolte, e libere sono de' nodi delle consonanze; tanto sieno i lor versi ben legati, e incathenati con quei legami d'accenti, e di pose, de' quali s'è lungamente ragionato: accioche

²¹ "[T]he alexandrine has in the freedom of its stress patterns the capacity for a type of variation of which English verse is incapable . . . Though a distinctly heightened form of speech, its rhythms are not insistent, and there is less danger that it will dominate the natural movement of the language, or tire the ear with rhythmic obviousness. English dramatic verse has to use other means to subdue and vary its rhythms; and one of the most effective is to abandon rhyme and make liberal use of enjambment." (Attridge 2013, 58).

²² In Trissino's *Sophonisba*, there are specific echoes of Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Sophocles' *Antigone* (Pertusi 1963, 416).

con questi numeri *adempiano quel, che loro mancasse*. Percioche non hanno quell'harmonia che dalle consonanze procede . . . In queste convien, che con la gravità delle sentenze, e delle parole sia *giunta una meravigliosa vaghezza*. In queste, poiché sono ignude di quella leggiadria, della qual' adorna l'altre rime . . . (1563, 371-2)

[it requires no little art to know how to chain the lines well and variously, sometimes with long, at other times with short endings. Thence derives a most beautiful variety of rhythms bringing very great delight to the ears: just like the diverse feet in Latin speech. Uncultured men who dabble in versifying do not realise it, and end their sentence at the end of each line . . . One must be very careful in the case of lines that are blank and loose from the knots of consonance: their verses must all the more be bound and chained with those ties of accent and breaks we have discussed at length, so that those rhythms prove successful in spite of what they lack. Indeed, they do not have that harmony which proceeds from consonance . . . As far as blank verses are concerned, it befits that the *gravitas* of the sentences and words be joined with a wonderful loveliness, because they are stripped bare of that gracefulness which embellishes the other kinds of verse.]

In epic poems written in *versi sciolti*, where the model was Virgil, enjambments abound,²³ despite Trissino's original reservations,²⁴ and translators of the *Aeneid* tried to render them in the vernacular. Annibal Caro's translation (1563-6) was widely praised also because of his willingness to render, and even augment, Virgil's enjambments (Roggia 2014, 132). But even looking at earlier translations, one notes, for instance, that of the 12 'strong' enjambments (where the main verb is *en rejet*) which one can find in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Niccolò Liburnio managed to render 8, while Lodovico Martelli 10 (see Vergot 2016, 41-3).

Let us finally come to drama. Since the same metre, *versi sciolti*, was used both for epic poems and tragedies (just like blank verse would be, in the 1550s and 1560s), enjambment's association with the elevated style in poetry was transferred to drama. While the commentators and translators of Aristotle's *Poetics* did not refer to enjambment, its performative poten-

²³ Vergot (2016, 43-52) shows that translators writing in *versi sciolti* were much keener on rendering Virgilian enjambments than those working with *ottave*. See Soldani 1999b, 311: if one reads the longer poems in *versi sciolti* of the Cinquecento, one immediately notices that enjambments "arrivano a interrompere il discorso in ogni punto possibile, scindendo perfino i nessi sintagmatici più saldi" ("go so far as to interrupt the speech at every possible moment, even splitting the most closely-knit syntagmatic ties").

²⁴ Trissino used many more enjambments in his comedy *I Simillimi* (derived from Plautus' *Menaechmi*) than in the *Sophonisba*, because he particularly valued the colloquial flow they could confer (Creizenach 1918, 269-70).

tial, learned directly from the Greek tragedies, mediated by Seneca, and influenced in several ways by Virgil's epic masterpiece, was not lost on the theatrical culture of the Cinquecento: whereas Trissino used enjambment sparingly in *Sofonisba*, Giovanni Rucellai (esp. *Rosmunda*, c. 1515 and *Oreste*, 1515-1520) and his imitators employed it lavishly (in Rucellai's work, enjambment is "one of the constant rhythmico-syntactical stylemes", Ariani 1974, 72, my translation). Not that this process was unproblematic: take, for instance, Lodovico Dolce. He was one of those who disagreed with Tasso and Minturno over the use of enjambment in vernacular poetry. He wanted poetic works to be as perspicuous and clear as (he felt) Petrarch, Bembo, and Sannazaro had taught, and the breaking up of verses could not produce *dulcedo*: "Dee adunque fuggirsi sopra ogni vitio di menar sospeso troppo a lungo l'animo, e l'intendimento di chi legge, con lo allontanar de verbi, o con l'intrico delle parole" (Dolce 1564, 304r, "You should then avoid as a fault beyond all else to keep the reader's mind and understanding suspended for too long, by placing the verbs at an excessive distance or by jumbling the order of the words"). Yet, in tragedies, enjambment was a device Dolce was fond to employ in order to, for example, foreground the agitation of the speaker (see Giazzon 2011). Here is Clytemnestra's outburst in the kometric exchange in Act 4 of his *Ifigenia*:

Oime figliuola, oime; che la tua morte
 Mi toglie la mia vita.
 Ecco, che 'l tuo crudele
 Padre, il tuo crudel padre,
 Destinandoti al crudo
 Fin, si diparte, e s'allontana, e fugge.
 Crudel padre, crudele
 Stella, crudel me stessa,
 Figlia, se col morir non t'accompagno.
 (Dolce 1551, 37)

[Alas, daughter mine, alas, that your death
 Deprives me of my life.
 Lo now, how your unkind
 Father, your unkind father
 Dooming you to that harsh
 End, departs, leaves us, and flees.
 Unkind father, unkind
 Star, I myself unkind,
 Daughter, should I not accompany you by dying
 (my translation)]

Clytemnestra's "baroque" (Giazzon 2011, 253) speech, displaying *geminatio* and *commoratio*, as well as many enjambments, manages to convey the moth-

er's distracted anguish. Another good example can be found in the literally breathtaking emphasis generated by the enjambment²⁵ of "sacro / Coltello" in Medea's speech in Act 4: "A te con petto ignudo / Pur a guisa di Menade con sacro / Coltello ferirò le braccia mie" (Dolce 1560, 213; "[Appearing] to you, with my bare breast / In the likeness of a Maenad, with a sacred / Knife shall I wound my arms", my translation).

Renzo Cremante (2019, 39-40) has shown that particular enjambments in tragedies written in *versi sciolti* were recognised and liked so much that later dramatists replicated them in their own works. The exclamation of Trissino's Sofonisba "Che piu tosto morire / Voljo, che viver serva de' Romani" was re-echoed by Gibaldi's Cleopatra ("Morir già Sophonisba in libertade / Volle più tosto, ch'esser serva, e viva") and Lodovico Dolce's Marianna ("Generosa Reina, che più tosto / Volle morir, ch' a guisa di captiva . . .").²⁶

In fact, Dolce's dramatic style, as rich in enjambments as his fellow playwrights' (a generalised proclivity which may thus be seen almost as a classicising hypercorrection to achieve *gravitas*), significantly changed the rhythmic flow of the Latin texts he translated and adapted. Sometimes, he managed to render Seneca's enjambments into Italian; at other times, he turned Seneca's hyperbatons into enjambments to make the image more powerful (see Giazzon 2008, 258). For instance, in the following passage from *Ercole Furioso*, Dolce introduced three homoeoteleutic proparoxytonic adjectives *en rejet*:

de me triumphat et superbifica manu
atrum per urbes ducit Argolicas canem.
viso labantem Cerbero vidi diem
pavidumque Solem; me quoque invasit tremor,
(Seneca 1917, ll. 58-62)

Di me trionfa, e con superba mano
Mena per le città di Grecia il Cane
Horrido, e ho veduto il giorno farsi
Pallido per veder Cerbero; e'l Sole
Pavido, e me ancor temenza scosse.
(Dolce 1560, 2)²⁷

Similarly, there is an interesting metrical and prosodic difference between

²⁵ All the more so because absent in the corresponding lines in Seneca: "tibi nuda-to pectore maenas / sacro feriam brachia cultro" (Seneca 1917, 806-7; in Miller's prose translation, "to thee with bared breast will I as a maenad smite my arms with the sacrificial knife").

²⁶ Trissino 1529, c4v; Gibaldi 1583, 114; Dolce 1565, 24, respectively. "Sooner die / Would I, than live a slave to the Romans"; "Sophonisba sooner dead while free / Would die than a slave alive"; "That generous queen, who sooner / Would die, than as a slave . . ." (my translations).

²⁷ "[Hercules] triumphs over me, and by his overweening hand / Walks through the cities of Greece the Dog / Horrendous, and I have seen the daylight turn / Pale at seeing Cerberus, and the Sun / Fearful, and even I was shaken with fright" (my translation).

the first three lines of Oedipus' final appeal to Thebes²⁸ in Dolce's *Giocasta* (on the right) and the corresponding ones in the Latin translation of Euripides' *Phoenissae* which he used:

O patriae incliti cives,
Videtis, Oedipus ille,
Qui inclyta illa aenigmata cognouit, et maximus fuit vir,
(Collinus 1541, n5r)

Cari miei cittadini, Ecco che'l vostro
Signor e Re; che a la città di Thebe
Rese quiete, e sicurezza, e pace;²⁹
(Dolce 1560, 50)

Dolce rewrites the passage that he could find in Collinus' version, but what is especially interesting here is that in Collinus' "readerly rather than theatrical" translation *ad sententiam* (Dewar-Watson 2010, 23), the lines are very concise, apart from the third one which extends so curiously,³⁰ while the flow of the speech in Dolce is rendered more fluid and elaborate thanks to the sinuousness of those initial enjambments. Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh used Dolce's text as their main source for *Jocasta*, but perhaps read Collinus' version, as well (Dewar-Watson 2010, 31): if they did, they were faced with markedly different patterns among which they could choose (and their choices will be exemplified in the next section).

To recapitulate, enjambment was theorised by sixteenth-century Italian critics as a marker of *gravitas*, and poets used it in epic poems as well as tragedies composed in *versi sciolti* to elevate their style, channelling Virgil, Seneca, and other classical authors. Dramatists, in particular, delighted in the performative potential of enjambments, which became a styleme of 'regular' tragedy. These critical considerations and, more importantly, the literary and drama texts embodying them, circulated widely and were embraced in continental Europe, especially France and Spain. In the next and final section, their impact across the English Channel will be evaluated.

4. Enjambed Confluences in Elizabethan Tragedy

As may be expected, given the premises outlined in section 2, no theoretical work on enjambment was produced in Elizabethan and early Stuart England, with one exception: in his *Defence of Rhyme* (1603), Samuel Daniel, after admitting his preference for blank verse in tragedies and long poems,

²⁸ "ὦ πάτρας κλεινῆς πολῖται, λεύσσειτ', Οἰδίπους ὄδε, / ὅς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἔγνω καὶ μέγιστος ἦν ἀνήρ," (Euripides 1913, 1758-9).

²⁹ "My dear citizens, here's your / Lord and king, who to the city of Thebes / Granted rest, and safety, and peace" (my translation).

³⁰ No clear metrical pattern has been detected here, apart from the generic isosyllabism which Collinus achieves in the first two versicles (corresponding to the two hemistichs of the first tetrameter).

returns to discussing poems written in rhyming couplets, and states that he approves of enjambment, curiously looking at classical (unrhymed) epic poems as precedents:

Besides, methinks sometimes to beguile the ear with a running out and passing over the rhyme, as no bound to stay us in the line where the violence of the matter will break through, is rather graceful than otherwise, wherein I find my Homer, Lucan,³¹ as if he gloried to seem to have no bounds albeit he were confined within his measures, to be in my conceit most happy.
(Alexander 2004, 231)³²

Daniel's "running out and passing over the rhyme" prompted by "the violence of the matter" is reminiscent of Trissino's defence of the liberty and spontaneity granted by *versi sciolti*, releasing the verse from rhymical strictures.

Nor is there much proof that Elizabethan playwrights read any Italian critical work on metrics and prosody. However, as far as tragedy is concerned, Italian dramatic texts evidently circulated in England in the sixteenth century. A few examples may suffice. *Freewyl*, an English translation of the all-prose, 'non-regular' tragedy *Libero Arbitrio* by Francesco Negri, was published in the 1570s (on questions of authorship and dating, see Bajetta 1997). As already seen, Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh adapted Dolce's *Giocasta*, while the authors of *Gismond of Salerne* drew on another tragedy by the same dramatist, *Didone* (first published in 1547; see Cunliffe 1906a). William Alabaster's Latin *Roxana* (c. 1595) is an adaptation of Luigi Groto's *La Dalida* (first published in Venice in 1572), while Viscount Edward Conway (1564-1631) owned a copy of the 1588 edition of Torquato Tasso's *Re Torrismondo* (Smith 2011, 2, 318). Besides, the so-called "Italian intermediation" must be taken into account:

The importance of Senecan tragedy and of Newton's work [i.e. the *Tenne Tragedies*] has never been undervalued in the history of the growth of Elizabethan tragedy. What is generally either given for granted and/or almost totally obscured is the importance of the Italian intermediation. All the translations collected by Newton were produced in the 1560s, just after Lodovico Dolce's important translation of Seneca's *corpus tragicum*, and some thirty years after

³¹ This reference is not altogether clear (the original spelling is "Homer-Lucan"): Gavin Alexander (2004, 404) interprets it as meaning that Daniel admired Lucan as his model for his *Civil Wars* because he had written an epic based on recent history unlike Homer, while others argue that "Homer-Lucan" was Daniel's nickname for his own *Civil Wars* (see e.g. Paleit 2013, 68).

³² There are other scattered notes – for example, when Ben Jonson accused Chapman's translations as follows: "the translations of Homer and Virgil in long Alexandrines were but prose" (qtd in Munro 2013, 217), he was probably critiquing Chapman's enjambed fourteeners.

the Italian tragedy revival in the *Orti Oricellari* group, and some twenty years after the Giraldi-Speroni debate in the 1540s . . . (Domenichelli 2019, n.p.)

Through the Italian mediation, a re-evaluation of the classical effects of enjambment could reach English poetry and drama, most likely not via theory, but through practice, and while Seneca's reception had, as is widely known, a huge impact on Elizabethan tragedy, the Italians had fashioned a rhymeless epic and tragic style that cherished run-on lines, a practice which they associated with *gravitas* and which went beyond Senecan imitation.

When studying the development of the use of enjambment in English blank verse, it must be stressed that it is a device that needs to be learned and honed, and that once it is used by many authors, is then easily taken for granted – for a comparable case, one may think of the extraordinary Elizabethan innovation of inserting prose into plays written in blank verse (see Bruster 2005, and Craig and Greatley-Hirsch 2017, 53-78).³³ It cannot be enough to state that “[i]n the couplet . . . Marlowe did arrive at enjambment; in blank verse, hardly ever” (Saintsbury 1914, 174) – an assertion whose veracity can easily be contested (in Marlowe's case, one should argue that it was a matter of choice on his part, not of inability). Dramatic enjambment involves awareness of its rhetorical and performative effects, besides a playwright's competence in wilfully mismatching meaning, rhythm, and syntax: it is a part of his or her “poetical dramaturgy” (Cheney 2007, 228-9). Therefore, if it is true that Chaucer had already invented a form of iambic pentameter and introduced enjambment in “new and unexpected” ways (Minkova 2009, 188), the functions and effects of enjambment in blank verse drama, and specifically tragedy, could follow different trajectories.

On the other hand, instead of ‘trajectories’, one could better employ the term ‘confluences’ (Smith 1988, 6), because different traditions, characterised by their own specific history and conventions, came to be accommodated: 1) enjambment in Greek and Latin epos and drama; 2) enjambment in *versi sciolti* epos and drama, which translated, adapted, and refashioned the classics; 3) enjambment in different theatrical genres and in different metres; 4) enjambment in vernacular poetry.³⁴ The field of investigation is vast, and this article aims at scrutinising only the first two areas; further research is required, focusing not on the quantity of run-on lines, but on what ‘work’

³³ For instance, in 1 *Tamburlaine* 4.4, when Bajazeth, emperor of the Turks, who is put in a cage and is mocked by the triumphant Tamburlaine, starts speaking in prose, which signals his enraged humiliation.

³⁴ For instance, while it would perhaps make little sense to compare the use of run-on lines in *Gorboduc* and in Wyatt's and Surrey's sonnets, the same cannot be said of comparing the use of enjambment in Shakespeare's sonnets and *Romeo and Juliet*, given the particularly lyrical features of this tragedy (see Bigliuzzi 2015).

they do: their function and effect.

Let us start with Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*. The sententiousness which marks the first tragedy written in blank verse is determined also by metrical end-stops which shape "moments of counsel, tendering them in memorable ten-syllable chunks which might otherwise have been lost to prolonged, enjambed argumentation" (Stagg 2021, 7). This style was deliberately chosen by Sackville and Norton, who, looking at the Earl of Surrey's *Aeneid* translations, were faced by a new, strange metre which was simultaneously characterised by enjambment³⁵ and yet oddly hemmed, as Robert Stagg insightfully argues:

Surrey syntactically or grammatically runs on about a quarter of the lines in his translation . . . Yet the verse still sounds hemmed and hermetic . . . The lines' highly regular iambic stress patterns, including a crucial stress on the tenth syllable, mitigate their syntactical or grammatical enjambment . . . This is verse which aspires to be plastic but manages only to be wooden . . . (6)

Writing in a new metre must have been challenging, and, as anticipated, Surrey was very probably following the Italians, as O.B. Hardison argues: "Surrey's free use of enjambment and his differentiation between syllable count and pronunciation suggest Italian rather than French precedents for his verse" (1989, 135). Taking their cue from Surrey and possibly directly from Italian tragedies in *versi sciolti* (since only co-eval Italian tragedies were rhymeless), Sackville and Norton introduced interesting enjambments in their *Gorboduc*. The tragedy already displays a knowing use of the device, something which has often been ignored or dismissed (except for Hardison 1989, 174: "Enjambment is used – often to good effect . . ."). In the first section, it has been seen that the number of enjambments is meagre in comparison to late Shakespeare, but quite significant when compared to the plays of the 1580s and early 1590s. In the following quotation, the phrase "True fayth" *en rejet* is noteworthy. Prince Ferrex is trying to reassure himself and his mother of the councillors' dependability, and says: "Their Auncestours from race to race haue borne / True fayth to my forefathers and their seede, / I truste thei eke wyll beare the lyke to me" (Norton and Sackville 1565, Aivr). The enjambed arrangement of "borne / True fayth" makes the phrase stand out, and that phrase was politically and religiously loaded in the Tudor period (and the relevance of "fayth" is further strengthened by alliteration: "fayth", "forefathers"). As in classical and Italian tragedy, however, run-on lines usually occur in narrative descriptions or expository speeches, not in

³⁵ "Surrey's first twentieth-century editor [Frederick Morgan Padelford] also estimates that a quarter of Surrey's lines in the *Aeneid* are 'run-overs' (Stagg 2021, 6n26).

verbal exchanges between *dramatis personae*. These, for example, are King Gorboduc's first words in the play:

My Lordes whose graue aduise and faithfull aide
 Haue long upheld my Honour and my Realme
 And brought me from this age from tender yeres,
 Guidynge so great estate with great renowne;
 Now more importeth mee the erst to use
 Your faith and wisdome wherby yet I reigne,
 (Aivv)

Again, "Your faith" appears *en rejet*, and the enjambment in the first two lines makes the king's speech overflow, facilitated by the conjunction "And" at the beginning of the third line. The rhythmic pattern may be suffocatingly uniform, but rhetorical devices such as enjambment and alliteration give it a certain variety. The ensuing effect enables King Gorboduc to dominate the scene. It is actually not so different from Marcus Andronicus' speech in *Titus Andronicus* 1.1, when he announces that the plebeians have chosen his brother as the new emperor:

Tenne yeares are spent since first he undertooke
 This cause of Rome, and chastis[é]d with armes
 Our enemies pride: Five times he hath returnd
 Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sonnes,
 In Coffins from the field . . .
 (Shakespeare 1594, A3v)

Here, too, one can notice the use of enjambment to 'give air' to the line endings as well as emphasise ideologically loaded phrases ("This cause of Rome"). One hears the same uniform iambic pattern, and virtually the same use of alliteration. Something that differentiates the style of the later play is the use of shorter sentences, but, on the whole, speeches like this complicate generalisations which equate stateliness with end-stopping ("In public orations and measured summations one frequently finds a high incidence of end-stopping", Rokison 2013, 287).

Such knowing uses of enjambment come to the foreground when it is recalled that "early Elizabethan versification is essentially an art of congruence, a fitting of phrase to metrical pattern" (Wright 1988, 46). One can best contrast this use of enjambment with the style of what was, as a matter of fact, the first Elizabethan tragedy: Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (first performed around 1560-1561). The fact that *Cambyses* is written in rhyming couplets (mainly fourteeners) does not *per se* justify the dearth of enjambment in the text, except for often quite weak instances: for example, "Lady deer to King a kin, foorthwith let vs proceed: / To trace abroad the beauty

feelds, as erst we had decreed” (Preston 1570, Eiv) where the first line contains a seemingly complete sentence, which only faintly finds a syntactic continuation in the next. This stylistic difference becomes even clearer if one compares this feature of *Cambyses* with the treatment of enjambment in the likewise rhymed fourteeners of the translations of Seneca’s tragedies published between 1559 and 1566, and then collected together in 1581 (the *Tenne Tragedies*). Although these texts were not conceived to be performed (unlike *Cambyses* – but see below for an exception), enjambment was frequently employed in them, as noted back in 1909 by E. M. Spearing: in the metres employed by Jasper Heywood in some of his translations of Seneca’s plays,³⁶ “the attempt to represent one Latin line by one English, whilst keeping the Latin order of words, has resulted in much *enjambement*” (440; see also Hardison 1989, 161-2); Thomas Newton (the translator of the *Thebais*, i.e. *Phoenissae*) followed suit, while Studley (who translated *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Hippolytus* and *Hercules Oetaeus*) was freer. The fact that these texts were not conceived for performance should be emphasised because enjambment tends to stand out more on the page than on the stage: whereas typography and punctuation help the reader in the detection of an enjambment, a spectator will need to scan the actors’ recitation to identify a run-on line, unless the actors emphasise the line-ending by pausing or altering the volume or speed of their voice.

In their attempt at rendering the Latin syntax and Seneca’s use of enjambment, these translators blurred the scheme of the rhymed line-endings. It must be stressed that their willingness to re-echo Seneca’s prosody and syntax did not coincide with faithfulness in their translations, even considering the alterations necessitated by the use of rhyme. See this passage from the *Thebais*, where Oedipus is speaking of his traumatic exposure as a baby:

Apollo by his Oracle pronounced sentence dyre
 Vpon mee being yet vnborne, that I vnto my Syre
 Should beeastly parricide commit: and thereupon was I
 Condemned straight by Fathers doome. My Feete were by and by
 Launcde through, and through with yron Pins: hangde was I by the Heeles
 Upon a Tree: my swelling plants the printe thereof yet feeles:
 (Seneca 1581, 45v-46r)

The text is quite different from the corresponding lines in Seneca:

. . . sed numquid et peccavit? abstrusum, abditum
 dubiumque an essem sceleris infandi reum
 deus egit; illo teste damnavit parens

³⁶ See Silvia Bigliazzi’s article in the current issue of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* for a more recent engagement with Heywood’s metrics.

calidoque teneros transilit ferro pedes,³⁷
 (Seneca 1921, 251-4)

Yet, one can argue that enjambment clearly contributes to applying a classical quality to the style of the translation. Consider also this part of Atreus' instruction to his servant in Heywood's translation of *Thyestes* 2.1, where the translator tries as much as possible to render the syntax of the original despite the constraints of rhyme:

. . . si patrum vocant.
 pater est, eatur.— multa sed trepidus solet
 detegere vultus, magna nolentem quoque
 consilia produunt: nesciant quantae rei
 fiant ministri, nostra tu coepta occides".
 (Seneca 1921, 329-33)

. . . if they him unckle call,
 He is their father: let them goe. But much the fearefull face
 Bewrayes it selfe: euen him that faynes the secret wayghty case,
 Doth oft betray: let them therefore not know, how great a guile
 They goe about. And thou these things in secret keepe the whyle.
 (Seneca 1581, 26r)

Seneca's text proves more powerful thanks to the distancing between the adjectives and nouns (trepidus . . . vultus; rei . . . ministri), and also because metrical constraints and structural differences between the two languages do not allow Heywood to enjamb precisely the same nexuses of the Latin text;³⁸ still, the run-on lines of the translation partially manage to have the same effect.

The contrast between *Cambyzes* and the *Tenne Tragedies* is revelatory: the translators recognised the performative value of enjambment in Seneca and tried to render it, although they used rhyming fourteeners in texts not conceived for performance. An interesting exception is Alexander Neville's (quite free) translation of *Oedipus*. In the dedicatory epistle of the first edition (1563),³⁹ Neville explains that he wrote it specifically to satisfy a few friends' request to see a staging of Seneca's *Oedipus* in the vernacular. Indeed, his

³⁶ In Miller's prose translation, "Hidden away, confined, my very being in doubt, the god made me guilty of a charge unspeakable. On that charge my sire condemned me, spitted my slender ankles on hot iron".

³⁷ This is also what happens in Heywood's attempt at translating the "spolia . . . patri / fraterna" enjambment in *Hercules Furens* seen in section 2: "I saw my selfe, I saw him lo (the night now gone, of hell / And *Ditis* tamde) throw out abroad before his fathers sight / His brothers spoyles . . ." (Seneca 1581, 1v-2r).

³⁸ For the sake of clarity, quotations from this edition will not split the fourteeners into distichs (the fourteeners are not split in the 1581 edition).

translation was performed in Trinity College, Cambridge around 1559-60 (see APGRD, “*Oedipus* 1559 - 1563”). The play’s opening speech contains a number of run-on lines. Sometimes, Neville manages to render Seneca’s own enjambments, other times he displaces them, especially because of the padding necessitated by the length of the fourteeners. See for example these two passages, where the “genitor-perimatur” nexus is displaced on to the enjambment “rise / A mischiefe”, and where Seneca’s *rejet* “funesta pestis” is not lost in the rendition, although the effect is somewhat lessened by the postponement of the verb (“The plague consumes”):

A kingdom is befauln to me, I feare lest hereof rise
 A mischiefe, (mighty *Ioue*,) to great I feare alas I feare
 Lest these my handes haue spoyled the lyfe, of the my father deare.
 (Seneca 1563, 1v)

(caelum deosque testor) in regnum incidi:
 infanda timeo: ne mea genitor manu
 perimatur;
 (Seneca 1917, 14-16)

The olde men with the yong (alas:) the father with the childe
 The plage consumes. both man & wife all beastes both tame and wylde
 Are spoyled by the Pestylence.
 (A3r)

iuvenesque senibus iungit et gnatis patres
 funesta pestis
 (54-5)

On the performative level, it is difficult to evaluate how the actors of the production would recite these run-on lines, considering the lack of information we possess. Perhaps they exploited the internal caesura as a moment where they could catch their breath and then continue reciting the enjambed line flowing into the next fourteener. It is clear, though, that spectators and actors expected a certain quality from a Senecan translation. In his preface to *Troas*, Heywood apologised for not always keeping Seneca’s “royalty of speach” (Seneca 1581, 95v). This phrase has sometimes been interpreted as referring to vocabulary, but, as Hardison explains, it actually “refers to elevation of language” (1989, 153), and enjambments were evidently recognised as elements that could contribute to it, since they were rendered and/or introduced in the translations.

The Elizabethans gradually discovered that blank verse could become a much better vehicle for “royalty of speach”: the absence of rhyme allows a greater number of run-on lines than in rhymed verse, since in blank verse the

pause at the end of the line is marked less strongly.⁴⁰ However, enjambing in the new metre could be difficult. Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh struggled with rendering the run-on *endecasillabi sciolti* of Dolce's *Giocasta*, but they seem to have been aware of the importance of enjambment as the Italian author's styleme.⁴¹ Thus, whereas Dolce has the "bailo" (tutor) salute Antigone with an impassioned speech filled with enjambments, the passage in the English translation loses some of its pathos because of their rather clunky rendition, which loses the first enjambment and has a uniform, oppressive rhythm:

Gentil figlia d'Edipo, e pia sorella
 Dell'infelice giovane, sbandito
 Dal suo fratel delle paterne case
 A cui nei puerili e tener' anni
 Fui (come saper dei) bailo e custode;
 (Cunliffe 1906b, 160)

O gentle daughter of King Oedipus,
 O sister deare to that unhappie wight
 Whom brothers rage hath reav[é]d of his right,
 To whom, thou knowst, in yong and tender years
 I was a friend and faithfull govenour,
 (161)

Elsewhere, Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh tried to remedy by actually 'streamlining' the original enjambment by splitting the verb-direct object unit where Dolce had another phrase (in the following instances, a vocative and an adverb, respectively) lengthening the enjambment:

Tu col tuo dipartir lasciasti, o figlio,
 La tua casa dolente . . .
 (Cunliffe 1906b, 192)

At thy departe, O lovely chylde, thou lefte
 My house in teares . . .
 (193)

Né potrete segnar sì leggermente
 Le vostre carni, che la mano, e'l ferro

³⁹ For a fruitful study of cesurae and pauses in relation to enjambment in dramatic blank verse, see Oras 1960.

⁴⁰ Consider also this quotation, taken from one of the passages from Dolce's *Didone* which influenced the authors of *Gismond of Salerne*, as detected by Cunliffe: "Però è ben tempo di provar s'io posso / Finir le pene mie con questa mano" ("Yet it is time I tried if I can / End my torments with my own hand", my translation), which becomes "But yet abide: I may perhappes devise / some way to be unburdened of my life" (1906a, 447).

Non apra insieme a questa vecchia il petto.
(194)

Ne can the cruell sworde so slightly touche
Your tender fleshe, but that the selfe same wounde
Shall deeply bruse this aged brest of myne.
(195)

Being shorter than the fourteener, blank verse could make the enjambment more effective, and this was a resource of blank verse which was to be employed also in a play that has been called the “most Senecan of all Senecan imitations” (Waith 1971, 48): *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. Peter Gibbard (2014, 322) has noticed that Thomas Hughes and the other gentlemen of Gray’s Inn who authored it introduced a number of enjambments which were extremely strong for the period: the frequency of run-on lines is quantitatively lower than in *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta*, but here their use more closely reflects Seneca’s sententious style; one could say that the result feels ‘less English’ and may have been favoured by the ‘cultivated’ tastes characterising the Inns of Court. In the following example, the unit between an attributive adjective and noun is split: “Not death, nor life alone can give a full / Revenge: join both in one. Die: and yet live” (Hughes et al. 1587, 7). But it is not simply the adjective-noun unit that gets enjambed – other strong examples are the pronominal subject-verb and modal verb-main verb units, as in this remarkable speech spoken by Mordred:

My thoughts misgive me much. Down, terror! I
Perceive mine end, and desperate though I must
Despise despair, and somewhat hopeless hope,
The more I doubt the more I dare: by fear
I find the fact is fittest for my frame.
(1587, 21)

Gibbard rightly remarks that “[i]n his effort to imitate Seneca’s brief sententiae, Hughes disrupts the line integrity characteristic of 1580s blank verse” (2014, 322) – but the knowing use of enjambment had been prepared by previous attempts in the genre (specifically, *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* and, to a lesser extent, the early Elizabethan Senecan translations which by then had been collected as the *Tenne Tragedies*).

When blank verse became routinely used in plays for the public and private playhouses from the 1590s onwards, dramatists could develop and diversify it. While we do not know exactly how Elizabethan professional actors delivered their line endings, data such as the insistent permanence in quartos and the 1623 Shakespeare Folio of a comma after “Now is the winter of our discontent” at the beginning of *Richard III* (thus: “Now is the

winter of our discontent, / Made glorious summer by this sun of York” 1.1.1-2) have led scholars to argue that theatregoers could hear a difference in scansion and understand immediately when the actor’s lines were enjambed (Kanelos 2011, 88-9).⁴² Given the instability of early modern play-texts, one wonders whether such devices were meant as directions to the actors or to the readers. On the one hand, it is more likely that punctuation was used by playwrights, scribes, and prompters as a way to instruct the players on how to deliver a line. On the other, considering the development of a market for dramatic texts, such punctuation may have acquired a function similar to that of commonplace marks to boost the memorability of certain lines. Further scrutiny is required on this question.

With Marlowe, end-stopped verse recorded a revival, but dramatic enjambment had then its qualitative (and, later, quantitative) heyday, epitomised by Shakespeare’s increasingly varied rhythmic patterns in his late plays (which are characterised not only by a growing number of enjambments, but also by lines ending with an extrametrical unstressed syllable, midline transitions, short lines, shared lines, and late caesuras – see Pangallo 2012, 100-25 and Stagg 2021, 10-13). Taking into account the fact that now enjambed blank verse was used also in comedies, one could argue that enjambment gradually stopped being a marker of the elevated style and was increasingly used to make dramatic speeches closer to everyday spoken language, while, in late Shakespeare, it also came to match “increasingly complex and irregular representations of the world” (Kanelos 2011, 84; think, for example, of Leontes’ tortured ‘affection speech’ in *The Winter’s Tale* 1.2). Still, the most extreme example of enjambment in the dramatic corpus of the period occurs in one of the earliest Jacobean tragedies: Ben Jonson’s much-maligned *Sejanus: His Fall*, first performed in the winter of 1603. In a scene of this heavily-enjambed play,⁴³ Sejanus, plotting to keep and augment his power, tells his accomplice and spy, Julius Posthumus, to lie to the empress mother and cause her to side against Agrippina’s party:

... Pray *Augusta*, then,
That for her owne, great *Caesars*, and the pub-
Lique safety, she bee pleas[']d to urge these dangers.
Cesar is too secure, (he must be told,

⁴¹ Consider also Pangallo 2012, 113: “Comparing two speeches, one from an early comedy and one from his last, evinces the two extremes of heavily end-stopped verse and heavily enjambed verse that marked the spectrum of [Shakespeare’s] career. They also reveal how – contrary to expectations – endstopped lines can demand speed in delivery, while enjambment might move more slowly”.

⁴² “There are almost twice as many run-on lines in *Sejanus* as in *Othello*, and 10 percent more than in *Henry V* and *Hamlet*” (Tarlinskaja 2014, 174).

And best hee'll take it from a Mothers tongue.)
(Jonson 1605, E1 v)

“[P]ub-/Lique” may seem a typo, but the metre shows that it is in fact a particular kind of enjambment, a *synapheia* across line breaks – a technique which interestingly out-classicised Roman drama: Seneca never uses it in his plays, whereas it can be found in poems by Horace and Catullus. It should also be noted that such a technique would seem to belong to printed texts, not dramatic texts conceived for performance (although this is not the place to investigate the particularly intricate textual history of *Sejanus*). However, when performing this play, the actor can pause at the end of the line to emphasise the split word: “public” is a very loaded word in the play, with dozens of occurrences. By enjambling the word, Sejanus wants to stress and proclaim the selflessness of his intentions.

Jonson’s fervent (and perhaps misplaced) sophistication in introducing *synapheia* across line breaks to English drama⁴⁴ nicely completes a process of confluences by which enjambment was developed in tragedies written in blank verse. By the end of the Elizabethan period, Shakespeare and other playwrights employed enjambment, valuing it as part of their poetical dramaturgy to diversify their metre. This article has argued that run-on lines had originally been introduced into blank verse to achieve what was termed the ‘elevated style’ of the classics, and this adoption occurred partly through direct Senecan imitation, but also through the mediation of continental (specifically, Italian) practice. The argument emphasises the non-insular character of Elizabethan verse-making, and casts new light on the complex development of dramatic blank verse, situating it in the context of the reception of classical metres.

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⁴³ Jonson inserted it in some of his poems, as well, for example in his Pindaric ode to Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison and in his translation of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, which set Swinburne foaming, calling the *synapheia* “bor- / D’ring circles” an “indescribable horror – an abomination” (1889, 112). The same device can be found in later Jacobean poetry and drama – an earlier example can be found in John Donne’s *Satyre III* (“blind-/ ness”, 67-8); see Gibbons 1984, 284.

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