“The peryod of my blisse”

Commas, ends and utterance in *Solyman and Perseda*

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Abstract

This essay considers evidence that commas were used in the Edward Allde print shop to denote a particular kind of interruption, and draws out how an attention to those interruptions shapes a reading of the 1592 play Solyman and Perseda, often attributed to Thomas Kyd. In doing this, the essay suggests that greater levels of literary interpretation are evinced in early modern compositors’ work than is normally acknowledged, and that this should be brought to bear on the editing and discussion of the texts they produced.

I

To begin with a problem: there is a play, Solyman and Perseda, often attributed to Thomas Kyd and first printed by Edward Allde in 1592.[1] It is “in many ways”, Lukas Erne has argued, “an important play”, frequently offering, in his opinion, “good example of Kyd’s dramatising dialogue”, but it seems to be the case, at least according to Erne, that there is “still no satisfactory modern edition” of it (Erne 2008, 157). Notably, too, many editors of the play have made similar grumbles before him. J. J. Murray, prefacing an edition itself, according to Erne, “unreliable both textually and critically”, announced an urgency of his own (157):

> For some time now the 1901 edition of Frederick S. Boas has proved inadequate. The errors found in his century-old text are at times so astonishing that it seems a mystery to me why no one, up to now, has undertaken a re-editing of the play. (vi)

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[1] As Arthur Freeman puts it, “the case for Kyd is quite strong, perhaps as strong as the attribution of *Tamburlaine* to Marlowe”; “Shakespeare and *Solyman and* Perseda” in *MLR* 58 (1963) p. 140) Recently Brian Vickers has used several methods of computer analysis to demonstrate Kyd’s probable authorship of the play still further; cf. “Thomas Kyd, secret sharer”, *TLS*, 18 April 2008, pp. 13–15.

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If Murray's edition is as bad as Erne implies, then it seems to follow that Boas turned in something close to a travesty. Murray, making careful mention of an encouraging letter from the renowned textual scholar "Sir Walter" Greg, tells us how Boas's edition is "denounced" in a "most unfavourable review" for three big failings:

> the inadequacy of the notes, the many inaccuracies of transcription, and, most importantly, Boas' failure to make an accurate collation of all the early editions. (Murray 1991, vi)

Even a cursory reading of these accumulated complaints would seem to lend some weight to Erne's own, then. The would-be editor of *Solyman and Perseda* might still hesitate before answering Erne's call to arms, however, if only because several of the complaints around the play lack a little clarity. Boas's notes must be inadequate *to* something, and his transcriptions, inaccurate, omit or change various details of the text he edits. What exactly is he missing out on, though? And what exactly is it that subsequent editions have failed to provide or elucidate?

No twentieth-century edition of *Solyman and Perseda* greatly resembles the text printed by Edward Allde and his men, it is true. Some changes made by the editors to their copy-text are more discussed than others and some, as we shall see, are made silently and without justification. Close inspection of the 1592 octavo of *Solyman and Perseda* argues, though, that several of its often ignored or silently dismissed details might well be key to what Erne finds most animates this "important play". Consider the specific juncture of the play he offers as example of "Kyd's dramatising dialogue", quoting at length and ending it here:

Perseda. Herein, *Lucina,* let me buckler him.
Basilisco. Not *Mars* himselfe had eare so fair a Buckler.
Perseda. Loue makes him blinde, and blinde can judge no colours.
Lucina. Why then the mends is made, and we still friends.
(2.i.43–46)

Erne's quotation omits the lines' punctuation as it appears in the 1592 octavo (173–174). Murray's text, likewise, changes the punctuation freely; so too does Boas's. This extract's final line and those following were first pointed thus:

Luci. Why then the mends is made, and we still friends,

Perse. Still friends, still foes, she weares my Carcanet,Ah false Erastus, how am I betraid.
Luci. What ailes you madam, that your coulor changes.
Perse. A suddaine qualme, I therefore take my leaue.
Luci. Weele bring you home,
Perse. No, I shall soone get home.
Luci. Why then farewell: Fernando lets away.
(C4v)

It is not unusual for editors of early modern texts to change—"modernise"—punctuation, as we shall see. A modern editor, though, faces a great many small but potentially very significant problems in doing that in this extract. To take one very specific example: the commas used at the ends of some of these lines, between one speaker, Lucina, ending, and Perseda beginning, have been variously ignored and changed by editors. Might they be relevant, though, to the conveyance of some of the effects of dramatic situation noted by Erne?

> The individual sequences are short and all four interlocutors participate. The conversation flows naturally. Singling out the importance of this aspect of Kyd's dramaturgy, Clemen describes it as an 'interplay [. . .] in which the speakers are delicately attuned to one another and establish a real contact. (174)

That "conversation flows naturally", that there is an "interplay" between characters, seems to be argued as one of the achievements that makes this such an "important play". How that effect is achieved is less clear, however, and, given that the gap between one speaker's words and another's is what's at issue, it seems odd that the punctuation marks present in that gap are not more discussed. And, to patch these little commas into the wider criticisms levelled at the Boas and Murray editions of the play, a modern reader simply doesn't know, because of the "inadequacy of the notes" provided, where "inaccuracies of transcription" might end and where policies of modernisation might begin. In sum, if we do not quite know what those commas might be doing there, nor do we know what editors think they are doing there when they change them.

Disregarding textual details like those commas isn't itself unusual. The punctuation of an early modern play-text is habitually dismissed as one of that text's "accidentals", affecting neither "the author's meaning or the essence of his expression"(Greg 1966, 376). In keeping with that distinction, first proposed by W. W. Greg in 1950, even those critics who find a great deal of interest in the pointing used in such texts acknowledge that it can very rarely be proven that the punctuation extant in the play-text had authorial origins: Anthony Graham-White begins his study of punctuation in "Shakespearean drama" with the disclaimer that "the central problem for the study of punctuation in Renaissance dramatic texts is that in most cases no one knows who put it there", for instance (1995, 13). From the would-be editor's point of view it seems that the commas that interest us in Solyman and Perseda can't be said with any confidence to be Kyd's (if Kyd was indeed the author of the play). Greg's distinction between the "substantives" and "accidentals" of a text had a caveat, however, which is not so much lingered on:

> It will, no doubt, be objected that punctuation may very seriously 'affect' an author's meaning [. . .] The distinction I am trying to draw is practical, not philosophic. (376, n. 4)

If we allow that the punctuation of a play-text might affect the way in which that "meaning" is conveyed to and received by a reader, then any punctuation marks that strike an editor as unconventional should give them at least some pause for thought. Evert Sprinchorn's monograph On The Punctuation of Shakespeare's Plays goes to some lengths to stress this:

> the scriveners and compositors who were directly responsible for the punctuation could hardly have spent a great deal of time inserting marks that made no sense. (2011, 10)

His "hardly" seems to imply that this is just good sound common sense. Nevertheless there is an obligation to draw together some evidence that scriveners or compositors were responding to the stuff of the text, its "sense", or "meaning", when they were about the business of "inserting marks" like the speech-ending commas that trouble the eye of the modern editor.

The problem considered in detail here, then, is to do with the punctuation of an early modern play-text: it seems initially a very simple one, but its implications may ask for extended discussion from the editor of Solyman and Perseda and indeed from editors of other early modern plays. When an editor encounters a punctuation mark in their copy-text that they deem necessary of "modernisation", where its usage is inscrutable to the conventions of the modern text, then I aim to ask in this essay what the editor might make of that punctuation mark. The focus here on speech ending commas in Solyman and Perseda allows us examination of the activities, resources and output of Edward Allde and his men, the work construed by R. B. McKerrow as that of a "Typical Trade Printer" (The Library, 1929, 121–62). It will allow us to establish how Allde and his compositors dealt with a challenge fairly unusual for the early modern printer and compositor and particular to the printing of drama, and, in arguing that that challenge of juxtaposing many different speakers on the printed page in a certain way was a matter of active interpretation of the text, we can go some way towards settling just how "typical" these actions and interpretations were of a trade printer, or, conversely, how particular they were to Allde and his men. In exploring the effects of such marks as these, occurring frequently throughout the play between different speakers on the page, we explore the textual presentations of some of the phenomena recognised, perhaps, in what Erne construes as "dramatising dialogue", and so can even hope, in looking at something so small as a speech-ending comma or two in Solyman and Perseda, to elaborate a little on what makes it an "important play".

II

The premise from Erne, then, is that *Solyman and Perseda* is a construct of "dramatising dialogue" where "real contact" between speakers is apparent to the reader. There is a lot at stake, too. The story of *Solyman and Perseda*, taken largely from Henry Wotton's *A Courtlie Controversie of Cupids Cautels*, rests on several key junctures where what you see might not be exactly what you get. The knight Erastus loses a love token given to him by Perseda and tries at first to pretend he hasn't—his desperate attempts to retrieve it lead him to kill another knight, Ferdinando, and so to flee Cyprus. Later his then patron, Solyman, falls in love with Perseda himself, and, learning then that Erastus and Perseda are in love with each other he allows them to leave together—only to change his mind and pursue her himself, dying lovelorn, eventually, after receiving from her a final and poisoned kiss. Throughout there are moments where these different speakers appear, somehow, to be concealing their true thoughts or feelings, and these moments are, Erne argues, crucial to the development of the plot in Kyd's hands. He argues that *Solyman and Perseda*, is, like Kyd's other plays, an achievement whereby

> the chief characters are introduced early on and the rest of the play develops a plot of intrigue and revenge in which the action does not advance in episodic linearity, but through tightly dramatised causality. As Aristotle put it in his *Poetics*, 'there is a great difference between happening next and happening as a result'. (4)

Presumably within the text, then, there are moments where, more locally, it's possible to discern a difference where things happen "next" or "as a result". My tentative suggestion is that the precise way in which the words of one speaker are juxtaposed with those of another is a direct contribution to the presentation of the play as a whole, forming and affecting a reader's notion of causality's place in the play. In other words, I am suggesting that Edward Allde's compositors were responsive to these concerns, and that their use of particular punctuation marks at the ends of speeches may exhibit something of their reading of the text and the dramatic situation they perceived from it.

Crucial to that view is the evidence that Allde's compositors tinkered with the punctuation of their texts with deliberation. Consider this, an exchange between Erastus and Ferdinando, with original pointing taken from the 1592 octavo:

Ferdi. Dasell mine eyes, or ist *Lucinas* chaine,
False treacher, lay downe the chaine that thou hast stole,
Erast. He lewdly lyes that calls me treacherous.
Fern. That lye my weapon shall put downe thy throate:

D3*v*

"*Then*", the early texts of 1592 and 1599 tell us, "*Erastus slaies Ferdinando*". The earlier of the two goes on like this:

Julio. Flie *Erastus*, ere the Gouernor haue any newes,
Whose neere alye he was, and cheefe delight,
Erast. Nay Gentlemen, flie you and saue yourselues,
Least you pertake the hardnes of my fortune.

D3*v*

Murray and Boas in their editions both replace the commas after "stole" and "delight" with full-stops. That they do so without comment or explanation might be seen a piece with editorial convention post-Greg, but here already their decision to replace both commas is troubling. That the 1599 edition changes one of these commas for a full-stop but not the other is puzzling, and seems to indicate that either the 1599 compositor changed the pointing as they went more or less indiscriminately, or, in making their changes, they responded with deliberation and some sensitivity to their copy. Perhaps, in other words, the compositor working in 1599 found the earlier comma somehow right for its situation, and did not the later.

Ignoring its frequency in *Solyman and Perseda* generally, ignoring too the particularity of the tinkerings with it in different editions of the play, Boas and Murray miss too the especial frequency with which the speech-ending comma seems to occur in Edward Allde's other dramatic publications. Harry Hoppe, on the other hand, observed in 1948 that "the use of a comma or colon instead of a period at the end of a speech" was especially frequent in sigs E-K of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*, a portion of text he assigned tentatively to Allde's print-house rather than John Danter's, having found type "identical [. . .] in several of Edward Allde's books" (1948, 3, footnote 2). The comparative increase of speech-ending commas and colons in those quires is noticeable. Hoppe divides the printing of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* according to a range of different compositorial habits in evidence throughout, but it is noticeable that he rests much emphasis on this habit of pointing:

> A third difference is of a nature that considered by itself might suggest only different compositors, but taken in conjunction with the above observations seems to point to different printing houses, namely, the number of punctuation errors. (43)

Neither Boas nor Murray comment upon these so-called "punctuation errors". And though Hoppe does note their frequency, and indeed finds that frequency to be particularly important and materially telling, by terming them "errors" he dismisses their literary import publicly as Boas and Murray do silently. Terming them "errors" is not helpful, in this respect, and it is markedly unhelpful when dealing with *Solyman and Perseda*. Hoppe's evidence, then, suggests strongly that such marks as commas and colons were used to end speeches in Edward Allde's printshop with a frequency uncommon to other printers: further investigation evinces a discrimination at work in their placement. In short, assuming such unusual pointing as speech-ending commas in *Solyman and Perseda* to be just so much more litter in a print output marked with "punctuation errors" inhibits any critical recognition that that unusual pointing is often a textual response to an unusual dramatic situation worthy of discussion.

First, as Hoppe notes correctly, this proclivity towards speech-ending commas does seem indeed to be a hallmark of Edward Allde's print-shop as a whole rather than that of a particular compositor's involvement. Indeed, identifying individual compositor involvement in *Solyman and Perseda* qualifies this assertion of Hoppe's, demonstrating that speech-ending commas are used throughout the printing of the play independent of that individual compositorial identity. In his work on Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* Hoppe makes note of several habits indicative of two different compositors at work in sigs E-K, which can be summarised briefly around orthographical habits, with one, Y, favouring "bloud" to X's "blood", "doe" to to X's "doo", "young" to X's "yong" and "heere" to X's "here" (43). Many of those distinctive traits can be located in the 1592 *Solyman and Perseda* too, despite its appearance some five years earlier. Further differences align neatly with the distinction made by Hoppe, suggesting that it was the same two compositors who worked on *Solyman and Perseda*, though this is, granted, an assumption, and worthy, perhaps, of further investigation. Crucially, though, tracking those same habits, and one tendency to favour the spelling "ould" for words like "bould", "tould" or "gould", to another's tendency towards "bold", "old" and "gold", strongly suggests that two compositors worked on the 1592 *Solyman and Perseda*, and that both used commas to end the words of a speaker with more or less the same frequency (see appendix). To Hoppe's findings, then, the example afforded us by *Solyman and Perseda* demonstrates that at least two of Allde's compositors pointed in this way across an interim of five years, and, if we discount the assumption that both plays shared the same compositors, even as many as four compositors might have used speech-ending commas with this particular frequency.

Further examination of these texts proves too that that frequency was driven with a particularity of placement. Of other individual compositorial habits noted by Hoppe in Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* and evident in *Solyman and Perseda* it seems plausible that one of the compositors was much more inclined to impose his own personally favoured orthographical forms on their copy-text, the other mimicking the author's spelling much more readily. If confident in its assignation to Thomas Kyd, it is noticeable in the printed *Solyman and Perseda* available to us that the pages set by one compositor adopt Kyd's idiosyncratic attachment to "oe" endings, and so the compositor that we might call Y uses "doe" frequently as Kyd does, alongside still more unusual spellings, "whoe" and "toe", which corroborate with similar spellings in several of Kyd's holograph manuscripts. The same is true of a similar predilection for ending several adverbs and adjectives

-ie rather than -y: "deadlie", "duelie", "vtterlie", "iustlie" and "willinglie" all feature in Kyd's letter to Sir John Puckering, anticipating such constructs as "trulie", "sillie" and "follie" in Y's portions of *Solyman and Perseda* (British Library, Harleian MS. 6849, c. 218*r-v*). That these seem to originate from a copy-text is argued by X's comparatively inconsistent approach to the -ie ending, using it sometimes but also, as Y doesn't, interchanging it with a -y ending from time to time. Both compositors use speech-ending commas, then, each with a frequency equivalent to the other, even though one in many other respects might seem to follow their copy more faithfully than the other. Furthermore, another important conclusion to be drawn is that the policy enacted in pointing this dramatic text seems more coherent between these two different compositors than does any approach to orthography.

A final implication to draw out from the common policy of pointing shared by these compositors — before moving onto what that policy might have been — is that which recasts these compositors as engaging with their text on a literary and aesthetic level rather than enacting a simple mechanical function. Another measure for compositorial identification, almost solely a graphical feature with comparatively very little angle on a reading of the text, that of the choice of letter-forms, seems to be inflected, in the work of both compositors, with something other than a mechanical response to necessity. Assigning remaining pages to compositor X or Y according to the distribution of their italic capitals is a more difficult business than might be expected; one cannot simply establish when precisely each compositor runs out of a regular italic *P* or a *B*, say, before being forced to use a swash or a roman equivalent. Their choice seems obliged to aesthetic considerations as much as material limitations. Thomas Ross is extreme in his view when he comes to consider this complication, and oddly affronted, but his take on the printing of *The Spanish Tragedy* in 1592 — another Edward Allde project — encourages us to call into question what our idea of "error" actually is, and where we derive it from:

> all of a sudden, as one reads through the play, things change for the worse. On B3r there begins a series of wrong fonts that continues throughout the signature. There are a number of italic B's — a mixture of swash and simple designs — where the text demands roman. This sudden decline in typographical harmony is accompanied by an increase in mistakes — not bad enough, yet, to make nonsense of the lines, but half-literate or ignorant. (17)

For the most part Ross can be ignored in his efforts to turn Allde's print-house into a tawdry kind of sitcom:

> Perhaps alcoholism was an occupational affliction of printers as it is (so they say) among housepainters today. [. . .] in Allde's printing house there was probably a sufficient measure of noise, horseplay and brown ale — perhaps too much. (15–16)

The distribution of italic *P*s and *B*s is clearly affected by material limits, and needing quite so many throughout *Solyman and Perseda* in order to mark the speakers *Perseda*, *Piston* and *Basilisco* poses the play's compositors a problem, granted. Noting that one compositor, our Y, seems to anticipate running out of regular italic capitals, spreading them out more evenly with swashes and romans than X does, demonstrates as well as the problem noted by Ross an engagement with it, and a preference and a semblance of taste and interpretation enacted in the way it is dealt with. It is reasonable to suggest that the same may have been possible of punctuation; the placement of a speech-ending comma may have been influenced not by a shortage of type but by the precedents of a house approach to pointing. Punctuating, then, is not necessarily a mechanical process but perhaps instead a local instance of what D. F. McKenzie termed a printer's "interpretative act". (2002, 268)

It must be stressed, then, that it is highly problematic to discount the speech-ending commas that occur in *Solyman and Perseda* as simple "punctuation errors". This is borne out by the later treatment of them by Allde's men. Comparing the 1592 octavo with a copy of the 1599 edition, 48 of the 71 earlier speech-ending commas are changed for full-stops, 1 with a colon, 1 with a question mark, and the remaining 21 retained as commas.[2] In some places, as on 1599's G3^r, a full-stop substituted for an earlier comma occurs only a few lines away from its counter, where the later compositor has actually changed an earlier full-stop for a speech-ending comma. Such a pernickety attention to detail is hard to ignore; that the retentions of the speech-ending commas seem to occur independent of compositor seems, again, to discount the possibility that these changes are simply whim or personal preference. Not corrections but amendments, the relation of the 1599 octavo and its pointing to the 1592 octavo's demonstrates very clearly an engagement with the pointing of plays in the Allde printing house. It is by no means formalised but, in the case of the commas used sometimes to end a speaker's words to another, punctuation does seem often to be deliberate, thought about, if even only a little, responding, at end, to the verbal material of that play and the dramatic circumstances implied by it.

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[2] The copy consulted is that held by the British Library, classmark C.34.b.45. Another copy of the 1599 edition in this state also held by the British Library is now generally accepted to be a 19th century forgery.

III

If we can go so far as to identify a policy of pointing exhibited in the example of these speech-ending commas, then it's as well to ask what that policy was, and what in the copy-text those commas and those compositors responded to. Anthony Graham-White, of a play with nowhere near as many speech-ending commas as any Allde play-text, *Looke About You*, offers us this interpretation:

> That the commas indicate interruptions is particularly clear since the lines are broken off midway through. Almost any punctuation mark, even a period, can at times indicate an interruption—*Looke about You* uses a colon in another scene [. . .]—since the dash was not in common use. (79)

It is tempting to tie Graham-White's findings to Erne's, to identify these speech-ending commas as presentations of interruption, and to link those presentations with the phenomenon of "real contact": to say that Kyd writes characters engaged in discussion with one another who do not speak consecutive but across each other, responding to something said before it is finished, leaving the interrupted speaker an unspoken dimension to animate their further actions and words. "Real contact" is manifest in the "lines that are broken off midway through", and the speech-ending commas used by Allde's compositors flag that up for us.

Our conclusion cannot be so simple, though. First, Graham-White's appraisal, though instructive, is very general, as we have seen. While he may be broadly right in saying that "dashes nowadays are often used to mark interruptions and incomplete thoughts", the variety of marks used at the ends of speeches in *Looke About You* and especially in *Solyman and Perseda* shows that a modern dash is no more neatly equivalent to the speech-ending comma used by early modern compositors than a modern full stop (72). Second, and connected to this, if "almost any punctuation mark—even, at times, a period—can indicate interruption", then the implication seems to be that such punctuation was placed indiscriminately, and in Edward Allde's example as considered so far, we have seen that not to be the case. Speech-ending punctuation was tweaked between editions, sometimes very carefully. Last, Graham-White's argument is circular. In such general terms, an interruption can, it seems, be identified irrespective of its punctuation, and its punctuation can be taken to denote interruption because that identification can be made. In the case of *Solyman and Perseda* and in drama generally, identifying an interruption as an interruption correctly is not a given, and is not as straightforward as Anthony Graham-White suggests. He does not say how a reader or a compositor might go about recognising a speech as incomplete without the suggestion or insistence of the punctuation.

That problem seems likely to have been wrestled with by compositors then as by editors today. Presenting a phrase as unfinished was in theory a familiar trope to a writer of Kyd's time, but the methods for such presentation aren't codified especially well. George Puttenham found of "A*posiopesis*, the figure of silence" that a speaker can "speake a thing, and breake of", as if "it needed no further to be spoken of", or that the speaker was "ashamed, or afraide to speake it out"; it might also be implemented "by way of threatning, and to shew a moderation of anger". It might even occur, as in one case, "for the flying of a bird ouerthwart the way, or some other such sleight cause". (166–7) These many and very different effects all rest on the same recognition that a phrase is unfinished. Modern editors can be often as inventive as Puttenham. Robert Carl Johnson, preparing his critical edition of *Cambises* states baldly "occasionally I must emend punctuation which would obviously disrupt the flow of the idea"(1975, 41). M. B. Parkes believes scribes and compositors found in the comma a particular efficacy "where the sense was left incomplete" (87). At stake already, even before the criterion of the completeness of a phrase is elaborated, is the separation of its verbal matter from something ulterior to it; in Johnson, an "idea", in Parkes, a "sense", and in Puttenham, broadly speaking, some distinct, endlessly variable intention. Like Graham-White and like Erne, all of these writers construct phenomena that might "flow" or not, and appear "complete" or not, and all of these speculated phenomena are abstracted from the presentation itself.

Anthony Graham-White holds that a "variety of marks" are used in the period to "denote interruption", but if interruption is apprehended then it is not denoted by those marks alone, but is instead a perceived sum effect of which the punctuation is one constituent part. Consider the pointing used here, for example:

Erast. Ah stay my sweete Perseda heare me speake.
Perse. What are thy words? but Syrens guilefull songs:
That please the eare, but seeke to spoile the heart.
Erast. Then view my teares, that plead for innocence,
Perse. VVhat are thy teares? but Circes magike seas,
VVhere none scape wrackt, but blindfould Marriners.
Erast. If words & teares displease, then view my lookes,
That plead for mercy at thy rigorous hands.

D2*r*

Perseda's refrain is something like an "is that *it*?" but it is hard for a reader to formulate a definitive answer, for, pointing aside, it is very hard to know for certain whether her words interrupt Erastus's or not. His phrases cannot be said by any criteria independent of their relation to Perseda's responses to be certainly complete or incomplete. The evident attention to speech-ending commas throughout the printing of this play and across Allde's dramatic publications generally encourages a reading to find in the comma winking at us after Erastus's "innocence" some literary import, but Anthony Graham-White's broad inference that such a mark "denotes interruption" doesn't quite fit. If the mark itself "denotes interruption" then it does so in a very different way than does this comma earlier, present here in one knockabout exchange between the braggart Basilisco and the clown Piston:

Pist. Why then thy Horse hath bin a Colt in his time,
Bas. True, thou hast said.

B4*v*

Another set of very different circumstances uses a comma in an otherwise very similar place at the end of a speech:

Basi. Nay then this fierie humour of choller is suprest,
By the thought of loue. Faire Ladie,
P*ist.* Now by my troth she is gon.

B2*r*

This is not to say that Anthony Graham-White's general premise that speech ending commas mark interruption is falsely applied or even particularly objectionable. Given the confidence with which we might find Allde's compositors to apply these commas with thought, though, it is apparent in these examples that they are applied conditional to quite nuanced specifics of circumstance unaccounted for by Graham-White's more sweeping conclusion. These are not on their own straightforward denotations, for interruption is not a stand-alone phenomenon conveyed by a speaker's punctuation alone.

Turning to an extract from a play printed rather earlier in the Allde print-house, under Edward's father, John, the complicated interrelationship of punctuation to change of speaker and the words used by those speakers is made rather clearer. Here punctuation does not just "denote" but contributes to a reading of dramatic circumstance as one reference point among many:

Newfan. Now so God help me thou art a pritty felowe Haunce,
A clene legged gentleman, and as proper a paunche.
As any I know between this and Fraunce.
Haunce. Yes by by God ich cud once daunce,
Newfang. I speak of no dauncing little belied Haunce:
C1*v*

This extract from Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* is made up with many clear formal differences to *Solyman and Perseda*.[3] It is written in rigorously rhymed couplets throughout, each line in a very approximate hexameter: nevertheless, approximate as it is, no speaker ever speaks less than ten syllables at a time. If we presume this to be far from what Erne and Clemen mark approvingly in *Solyman and Perseda*, the "real contact", and the "conversation that flows naturally", drawing out the ways in which these formal features prevent such effects is helpful. For one thing, establishing phrases as incomplete in such a framework of verbal regularity is theoretically rather easier, where every phrase is expected to occur next to a consummating rhyme, and to last somewhere in the region of twelve syllables. That theoretical regularity can be applied too to the text's punctuation, as by Robert Carl Johnson, who discerns in *Cambises*, another play printed first by John Allde and later by Edward, evidence of "pattern punctuation":

> the couplet punctuation which is often established in long speeches: the first line is pointed with a colon, second line with a period, third with a colon, etc. (41)

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[3] My transcription here is taken from the EEBO facsimile copy of the edition printed by John Allde sometime soon after 1568. The original is currently in the possession of the Folger Library.

What this extract from *Like Will to Like* makes plain, however, is that the pattern that exists turns to expectation rather than a sustained regularity. The punctuation is a mess of different obligations: the pattern that Johnson notes is in his terms "established in long speeches", but here, with a rapid-fire change of speakers, a reader's attention is drawn to the dismantling of that precedent. That change of speakers, and the preponderance of repeated rhymes, means that both "paunche" and "Fraunce" are full-stopped, the former according to the "pattern" established until that point, the latter aligning with a change of speaker and a syntactical conclusion. The comma after "daunce" is thus an assertion quite apart from any previous couplet punctuation, Newfangle's response, not necessarily an interruption, an interrogation of Haunce's terms: "Yes by by God ich once cud daunce"/"I speke of no dauncing little belied Haunce".

So what to make of all this? The pattern-punctuation identified by Johnson as a kind of ideal template to aid the reader is clearly inadequate to junctures of this kind of dramatic complexity. The other regularities that ran parallel to these couplets also go a little akimbo here too, with Haunce touching an expected hexameter, for example, only by drunkenly stuttering: "Yes by by God". This play does not just exhibit straightforward compositorial incompetence, then, but rather signals deliberate compositorial engagement with a play that is difficult to understand and so pointed carefully—indeed comparing this extract with its rendering in Edward Allde's 1587 edition, it is striking that the punctuation is retained even despite fairly significant verbal tweaks being made to the text.[4] The facility of the comma as it stands in these editions of *Like Will to Like* lies somewhere between flagging up a pattern, as Robert Carl Johnson finds it to "often", and denoting a specific effect, say of interruption, as Anthony Graham-White argues it might. Here it draws a reader's attention to the pattern that no longer exists, and it invites a consideration of the jostling reasons why that has come to be the case; here the relation between the two speakers. In part this comes about because the pattern established beforehand is indeed inadequate to this relation, but it is important to allow that the effect of its breakdown here is flagged up by the punctuation marks: where they were earlier the apparatus of the pattern, they now assert its collapse.

Saying speech-ending commas are used to "denote interruption" is very broadly correct, perhaps, but it homogenises a cohort of diverse expressions with some illegitimacy, and, if a modern editor replaces them with dashes, they risk forcing a range of context-dependent effects into a single independent function. At vaguest, the speech-ending comma in *Like Will to Like*, as in *Solyman and Perseda*, might be said to express an uncertainty of completion, which is not quite the same as a denotation of interruption. A speaker who might or might not be finished is slightly but crucially different from a speaker who appears definitely unfinished — and that slight difference in character presentation may have profound implications for the way in which we read the play as a whole. And it does seem that compositors of early modern plays had their readings of them — or at least Edward Allde's did, retaining aspects of "pattern punctuation" in *Like Will to Like* in the same year that they were working on the later portions of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* identified by Hoppe. In sum, the evidence offered us by Allde's dramatic output suggests that his men worked with a common approach which involved attending to the specific dramatic circumstances they were pointing on a localised and case-by-case basis, rather than using punctuation marks indiscriminately or according blindly to any hard and fast *a priori* convention.

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[4] The 1568 "paunche" is changed to "praunce" in the equivalent extract in the 1587 edition printed by Edward Allde.

IV

Formulating a reading of *Solyman and Perseda* when taking those speech-ending commas into account, we could do worse than start with the final words spoken by Solyman in the play:

> And now pale Death sits on my panting soule,
> And with reuenging ire dooth tyrannise,
> And saies: for *Solimans* too much amisse
> This day shall be the peryod of my blisse.
>
> *Then* Soliman *dyes, and they carry him forth with silence.*
>
> I2*r*

"Peryod", John Murray notes sagely, "as metaphor would most aptly be used by a scrivener or professional writer", but, spoken by Kyd's Persian king at end of all that has preceded, it is rather more than a metaphor. (Erne, 102) It is a pun too. This day, Solyman says, is to be "the peryod" of his bliss — but what kind of a period is he thinking of? Was this day, as the *OED* defines "period", "the time during which something runs its course", its "duration; allotted time; natural lifespan", or rather "An end, a completion" in itself? In simple terms, Solyman's last words may deplore this day as the conclusion of his happiness, or they may constitute, following Perseda's kiss, though poisoned, a rather touching *je ne regrette rien*, affirming this day, though his last, to be the duration of his bliss.

Forwarding that slightly soppy reading acknowledges an ambiguity in the term "peryod", but it also stresses an uncertainty to do with how punctuation actually works, which has major bearing on how we might understand the effect of the commas used to end speeches in the play. Ben Jonson's definition of a period and its application is instructive:

> A Period is the Distinction of a Sentence, in all respects perfect, and is marked with one full prick, over against the lower part of the last letter, thus (.) (*English Grammar,* 552)

How far a full-stop flags up the completeness of a sentence—the point at which it is "in all respects perfect"—and how far it imposes it is not clear in Jonson's definition. Indeed it is no clearer by the current Oxford English Dictionary definitions given above. The ambiguity around what Solyman means by what he says is not, then, limited to this local instance: we do not just wonder what Solyman means by "peryod" here, but what a period itself means, and how punctuation itself relates to the verbal material of the play. The speech ending commas earlier in the play make it ambiguous whether a character has finished speaking or not, perhaps, but there is an ambiguity ulterior even to that, where a reader is not sure how much it matters, and how necessary it is that the completeness of a character's phrase needs to be publicised and confirmed in order to be understood, or whether its component terms are themselves enough.

References to periods in a great many plays near contemporary to *Solyman and Perseda* carry a very similar frisson. In the *Tamburlaine* plays, for example, Theridamas promises that his soldiers will "make no period/Until Natolia kneel before your feet" (*2 Tamburlaine,* i.3.16–17), and Tamburlaine strives to conglomerate all Zenocrate's virtues in "one Poems period" (*1 Tamburlaine,* v.1.169); in *Edward II* Gaveston admits

> Weaponless must I fall, and die in bands?
> O, must this day be period of my life! (10.3–4)

Emphatically, too, late on in Shakespeare's career, we find Lodovico exclaiming at *Othello*'s conclusion "O, bloody period!" (v.2.355) Writers of the time, certainly, gestured, at the very least, towards punctuation and its functions in such instances as these, and so the writer of *Solyman and Perseda* was not unusual in this respect. Where *Solyman and Perseda* is unusual compared with these plays is in its continual examination of its own phrases, often presenting an utterance or an action for examination, a spectator asking, often, whether that action is complete. This is often held up for a reader's consideration by the compositors' use of the speech-ending comma. Solyman's terminal pun on "period", as these others, conflates two models of punctuation. Whether or not the completeness of a phrase can be ascertained prior to the full-stop's placement, or only as a result of it, the two models coincide at end: the phrase is manifestly finished as Solyman is "*carried foorth in silence*".

Commas seem instead to be used to separate phrases while also involving them with one another. Jonson again:

> A Comma is a distinction of an imperfect Sentence, wherein with somewhat a longer breath, the Sentence <going before is marked off from the Sentence> following; and is noted with this shorter semicircle (,) (*English Grammar,* 552)

The perfection of a sentence might be established according to a number of criteria being satisfied coincidentally, and in the examples considered so far these may include metre, a rhyme scheme, syntactical obligations, or even the very basic fact that another speaker begins to speak. Of note here, though, is how Jonson marks the completeness of one sentence only in relation to another: "the Sentence going before is marked off from the Sentence following". In all the examples considered so far where a comma stands between one speaker's words and another, the speaker responding offers a commentary to some of the terms spoken by the first. They are not necessarily an interruption, then, for they are additions to the phrase preceding, but it may be that they prevent, by being spoken in response, an addition spoken by the original speaker.

Solyman and Perseda is, Erne argues, an "important play", an exhibition of "tightly dramatised causality" rather than "episodic linearity"(4). That perception depends upon events being apprehended as discrete from one another and responsive to one another, and so, in its most basic formulation, one speaker says something in reply to a speaker saying something else, demonstrably responding rather than speaking merely consecutively. Here it has been argued that Allde's men recognised such a phenomenon and used commas to try and pull off a paradox, marking phrases as discrete from one another but pointing up their mutual involvement. We might consider again Perseda's relentless practical criticism:

> *Erast.* Then view my teares, that plead for innocence,

Perse. VVhat are thy teares? but Circes magike seas,
VVhere none scape wrackt, but blindfould Marriners.
D2*r*

Is it right to wish Erastus the time to explain further? The comma does not necessarily demand that he is interrupted, for his instruction is made meaningful by Perseda's response to it. As with *Like Will to Like*, one of the criteria of the phrase's completeness is self-evident, in that Perseda speaks and so Erastus necessarily does not. The uncertainty as to the comma's status is importantly different to the affirmation of a modern dash, implying not that this phrase is incomplete but that there could potentially be an addition to it. This is made more pronounced as Perseda focuses her statement with two "but"s, where Erastus might or might not have had an expanding "and". The difference is small, but throughout *Solyman and Perseda* there are many occasions where speakers say things perfectly sensible and effectual in of themselves, but where saying more at the time may have prevented later complication or confusion.

Me thinks I should not part with two such friends,
The one so renownd for armes and curtesie,
The other so adornd with grace and modestie:
Yet of the two Perseda mooues me most,
I and so mooues me, that I now repent,
That ere I gaue away my hearts desire,
What was it but abuse of Fortunes gift,
And therefore Fortune now will be reuengde.
G1*r*

Lukas Erne construes this, "the very moment" when Erastus and Perseda are reunited, to be the point at which "Soliman's desire, which is to prove fatal to their love, is rekindled"(189). That "desire", like an editor's "thought", or "idea", or even the "essence" of a "meaning", is not theoretically something that can exceed the phrase itself, as Erne seems to suggest it is. "What words in affection doo I see?" is Solyman's first reaction to the reunion, which provides no evidence of inner turmoil beyond a desire for clarification. Erne's "desire" is an attempt to reconcile Solyman's complaint here with his earlier actions, when he "joyned their hands, whose hearts are knit already", but to find it evident in "the very moment" when Erastus and Perseda were reunited is a matter of speculation, not, perhaps, invalid, but a matter of speculation nonetheless.

The engagement displayed by Allde's compositors as they point the interaction between a multiplicity of speakers in *Solyman and Perseda* is often a practical one, but, to use that term of Greg's, its direction is "philosophic", effecting the aspect ulterior to what a speaker might say: referred to in a critical shorthand as, variously, a "thought", an "idea", a "meaning", and so on. The unusual frequency of speech-ending commas in this play argues strongly that Allde's compositors attended to this pointing, and it is demonstrably the case that discussion of the effects of that pointing are possible. This requires significant reappraisal of the compositor's role in the printing of the early modern play-text. More, as identifying the mechanics of interruption proves problematic, discussion of the effects of pointing in printed drama are demonstrably necessary, testing that critical shorthand. Something about the text of *Solyman and Perseda* enables a critic like Lukas Erne to describe a passage in these terms: "a moment of real drama, the exterior theatrical thrill being sustained by the inner struggle in Perseda and Soliman" (2008, 185). A great many critics have taken issue with reference to a dramatic character's "inner" anything, with Katharine Eisaman Maus putting the reasons for that perhaps most succinctly: "inwardness as it becomes a concern in the theater is always perforce inwardness displayed" (32). It can be forwarded, then, that speech ending commas are one means by which that display is made on the page, and that the "inner struggle" described by Erne is something that is read into a discontinuity in expression. Solyman may have desired Perseda at the point at which she was reunited with Erastus, or Solyman may have changed his mind since. At issue is not inwardness, which is an end effect, but discontinuity, and the uncertainty that comes relating one phrase to another. In this way then, even such small details as the speech ending commas in *Solyman and Perseda* can be said to have marked, for Allde's compositors, a problem every bit as "philosophic" as it was "practical".

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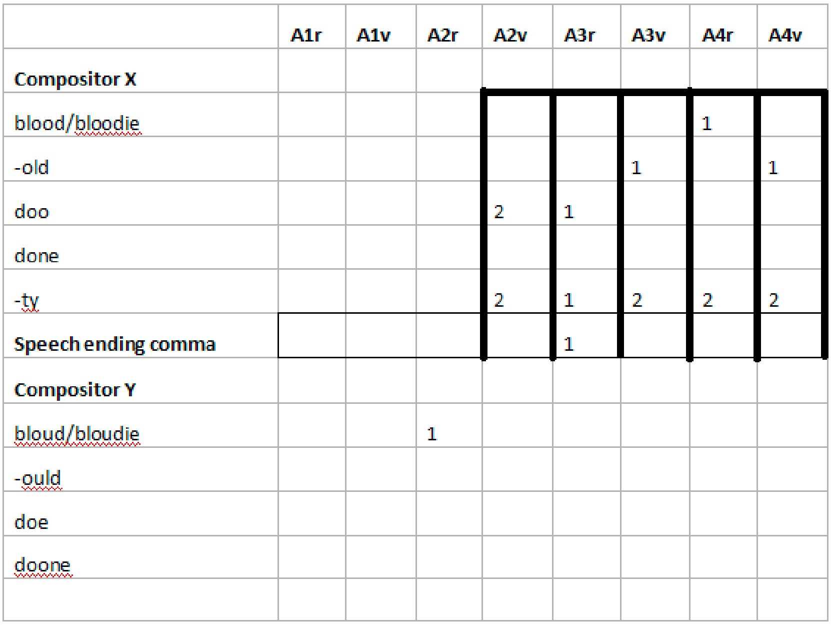
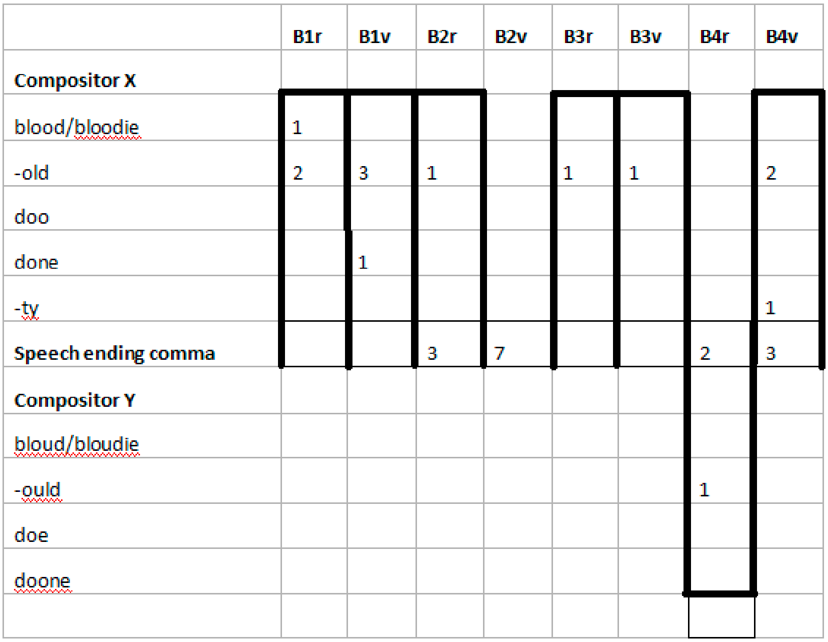
Appendix — Compositorial Labour on Solyman and Perseda 1592

Provided here are the beginnings of an assignation of compositorial labour on *Solyman and Perseda* (London: Edward Allde, 1592), based on Harry R. Hoppe's identification of compositorial habits in the portions of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* printed in Allde's printing house in 1597.

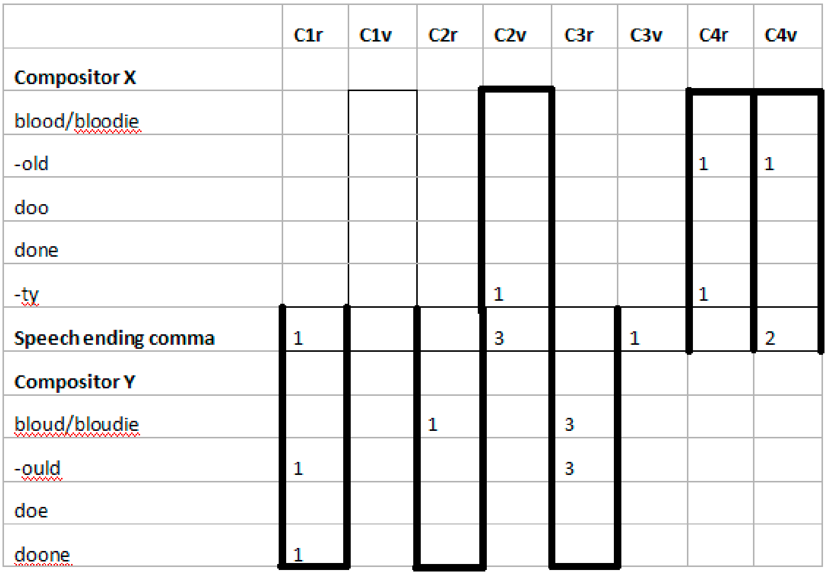
I have not assigned pages to particular compositors where identification by Hoppe's criteria remains inconclusive. Nevertheless it seems broadly correct to assert that speech-ending commas were used by both compositors, irrespective of any other presentational or orthographical habits identified here.



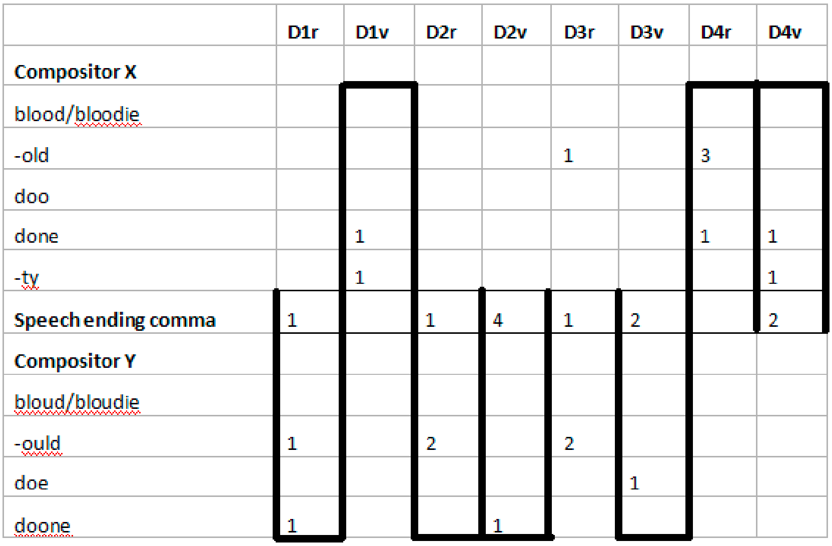
	A1r	A1v	A2r	A2v	A3r	A3v	A4r	A4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie							1	
-old						1		1
doo				2	1			
done								
-ty				2	1	2	2	2
Speech ending comma					1			
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie			1					
-ould								
doe								
doone								



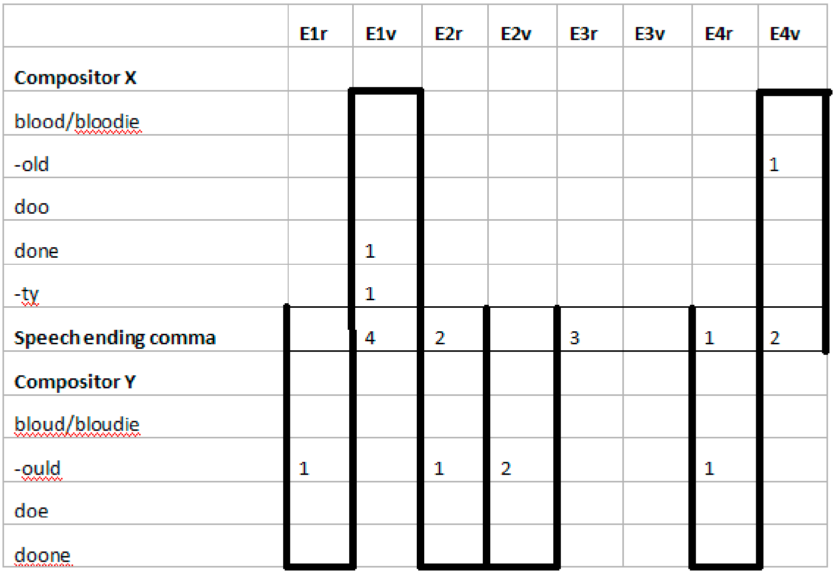
	B1r	**B1v**	**B2r**	**B2v**	**B3r**	**B3v**	**B4r**	**B4v**
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie	1							
-old	2	3	1		1	1		2
doo								
done		1						
-ty								1
Speech ending comma			3	7			2	3
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie								
-ould							1	
doe								
doone								



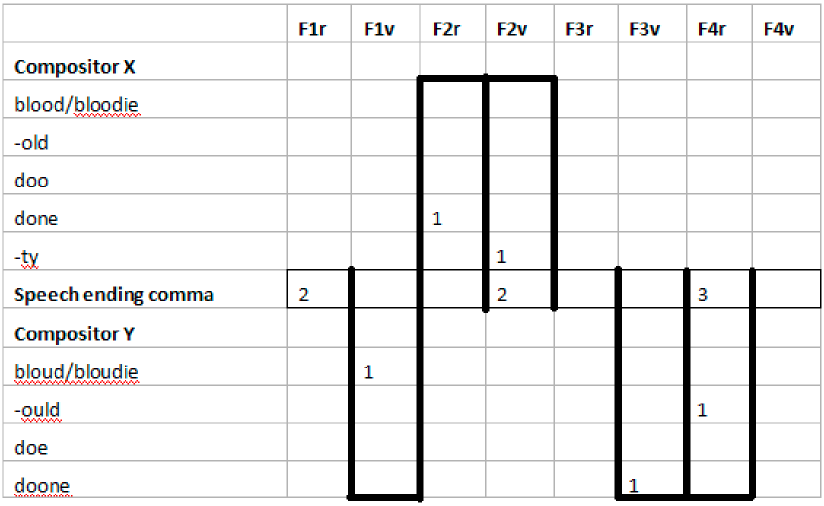
	C1r	**C1v**	**C2r**	**C2v**	**C3r**	**C3v**	**C4r**	**C4v**
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old							1	1
doo								
done								
-ty				1			1	
Speech ending comma	1			3		1		2
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie			1		3			
-ould	1				3			
doe								
doone	1							



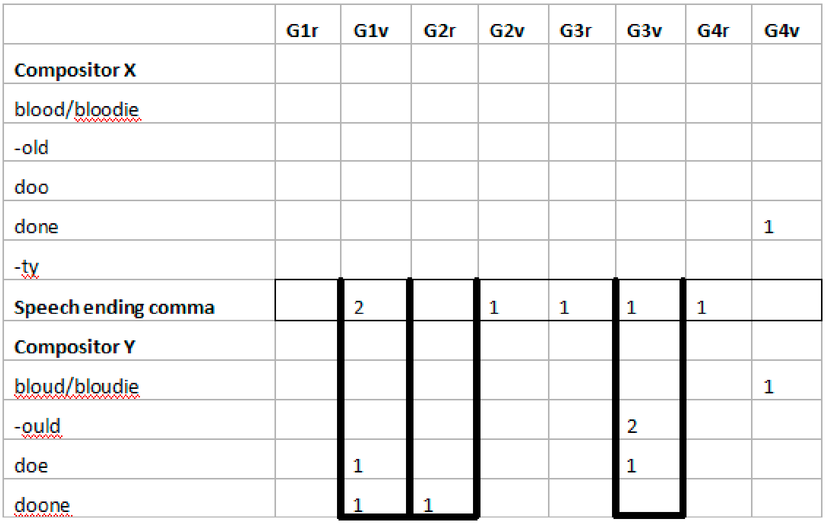
	D1r	D1v	D2r	D2v	D3r	D3v	D4r	D4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old					1		3	
doo								
done		1					1	1
-ty		1						1
Speech ending comma	1		1	4	1	2		2
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie								
-ould	1		2		2			
doe						1		
doone	1			1				



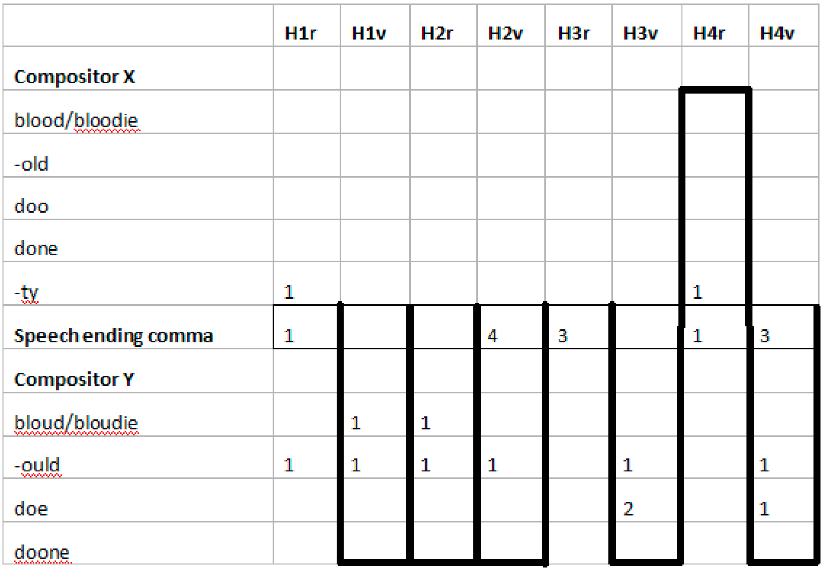
	E1r	E1v	E2r	E2v	E3r	E3v	E4r	E4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old								1
doo								
done		1						
-ty		1						
Speech ending comma		4	2		3		1	2
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie								
-ould	1		1	2			1	
doe								
doone								



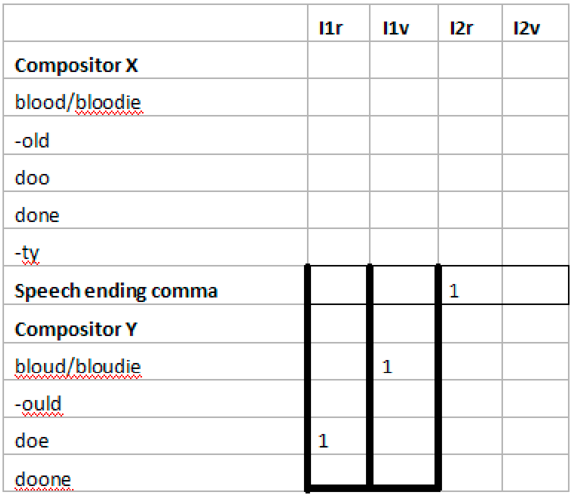
	F1r	F1v	F2r	F2v	F3r	F3v	F4r	F4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old								
doo								
done			1					
-ty				1				
Speech ending comma	2			2			3	
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie		1						
-ould							1	
doe								
doone						1		



	G1r	G1v	G2r	G2v	G3r	G3v	G4r	G4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old								
doo								
done								1
-ty								
Speech ending comma		2		1	1	1	1	
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie								1
-ould						2		
doe		1				1		
doone		1	1					



	H1r	H1v	H2r	H2v	H3r	H3v	H4r	H4v
Compositor X								
blood/bloodie								
-old								
doo								
done								
-ty	1						1	
Speech ending comma	1			4	3		1	3
Compositor Y								
bloud/bloudie		1	1					
-ould	1	1	1	1		1		1
doe						2		1
doone								



	I1r	I1v	I2r	I2v
Compositor X				
blood/bloodie				
-old				
doo				
done				
-ty				
Speech ending comma			1	
Compositor Y				
bloud/bloudie		1		
-ould				
doe	1			
doone				

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