

# GRANDIOSE GESTURES: TEXT DECLAMATION AND THE SONGS OF LOUISE TALMA

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## ABSTRACT

Louise Talma (1906–1996) was an American composer whose musical output included a large quantity of works for vocal forces. Most prolifically, she wrote art songs, completing around forty in her lifetime. This study examines the interaction between text and music in a selected number of her songs with text by Wallace Stevens. Specifically, it uncovers how declamation is used as a tool to express the character of her chosen text.

The study accomplishes this by making adaptations to Harald Krebs's Basic Rhythm of Declamation (BRD), a model for recomposition and comparison. Krebs's model is originally for German-language Lieder from the Romantic era and metrically regular poetry, but this essay makes modifications such that the BRD can be applied to songs in English with loosely-metrical text. Talma's songs frequently sacrifice the metrical integrity of the poems, not haphazardly, but to serve expressive ends and embody the meaning of the words. The same model could be applied further to songs in English with texts possessing elements of regularity by any number of composers, and pedagogically provides a new perspective in the theory classroom, as well as in composition and voice lessons.



Grandiose Gestures: Text Declamation and the Songs of Louise Talma

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# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction

Music's relationship with text has been a point of fascination among composers for centuries. The meaning of the words and ideas expressed in the text clearly matter, as can be seen by the myriad ways composers create appropriate, engaging atmospheres: The romantic affinity for pastoral scenes (possibly by a river; see Schubert's "babbling brooks") cannot be denied, nor can the nearly infinite wealth of songs about flowers, love, or both by composers from Monteverdi to Britten and Lang to Larsen. Even if the specifics differ, composers share a goal of intertwining words and music to represent their topic. Often, we focus on aspects like text painting, pitch, texture, and harmonic rhythm to uncover the specific methods composers use to bring the text to life, but there exists another layer to this: the way composers set the words in time matters, too. In examining text declamation, we open a window of insight towards a new perspective and greater understanding of the composer's style and intention.

Harald Krebs (2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2018, 2021) has developed a robust system for the analysis of declamation, developed around German Lieder from the Romantic era. This system, which Krebs calls the Basic Rhythm of Declamation (BRD), reveals the details of declamatory strategies at both the surface level and at a grander scale through the processes of recomposition and comparison. This study will adapt the BRD for application in the modern era, accounting for advancements in poetic texts and musical style. I will be focusing these efforts on songs by the American composer Louise Talma (1906–1996), exploring how the intersection between words and music embodies a core element of her songwriting technique.

Talma was a composer who was handsomely decorated with awards during her life but is mostly forgotten today in the concert hall. She holds the record for most residencies at the

MacDowell colony in New Hampshire, two Guggenheim fellowship awards (awarded consecutively), and was the first woman elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, among other accolades (Cohn 2013, 1). Her most well-known pieces are her assorted works for piano (she was a concert pianist herself and had a career before she began her compositional studies with Nadia Boulanger), but she most prolifically wrote songs early and late in her career. The earliest extant work of hers we know of is for the voice, and she completed around forty traditional art songs and numerous others for choirs or voice with chamber ensemble during her life.<sup>1</sup>

The current authoritative source on Talma's life and music is Kendra Preston Leonard's *Louise Talma: A Life in Composition* (2014), which smoothly combines biographical information with general musical analysis. Preston Leonard has also published a survey of each of Talma's extant art songs, presenting many of them for the first time in modern, engraved notation. Other studies specifically about Talma's work include those by Elaine Barkin (1971, 142–52), Susan Teicher (1983), Luann Dragone (2003), Sarah Dorsey and Anna Neal (2008), Laura McDonald Moore (2008), Meredith Melvin Johnson (2020), and William Hayter (2022). Additional research which references or examines works by Talma, but are not centrally about her, include a portion of a chapter from Denise Von Glahn's *Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose the Natural World* (2013, 86–104), a section of Joseph Straus's *Twelve-tone Music in America* (2009, 102–4), and significant portions of Carole Jean Harris's 2002 dissertation (44–66, 102–29, 155–62).

Despite the attention Talma has received in the above sources, little analytical attention has been given to her art songs, which encapsulate in minute form many of the stylistic details of

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<sup>1</sup> Many such songs are unpublished and/or unrecorded. For a complete list of works and recordings, see Preston Leonard (2014, 234–43).

her compositional interest at that time. The study at hand attempts to fill this lacuna by examining in detail Talma's setting of Wallace Stevens's "Infanta Marina," completed in 1988. This song, whose text is set against a loose background of metrical regularity, provides an effective model not only for increasing understanding and visibility of Talma's vocal works, but also for adapting Krebs's BRD for a modernist tradition.

## 1.2 Verse, Feet, and Scansion

Verse, carefully and thoughtfully crafted, possesses an innate rhythm and cadence. As a temporal art, even the most metrically free poems still have this semblance of order, a logical organization by which the reader experiences the text. As Martin Boykan (2000, 133) observes, though, verse undergoes a "sea change" when set to music. The poetic rhythms are replaced with musical ones, melismas and agogic accents interfere with stress hierarchy, pitch is introduced, words and lines may be repeated, and so on. A musical setting of any text adds baggage to an already completed work of art, an additional layer for listeners to contend with and extract meaning from.

Composers through history, then, were concerned with a "proper" reading of the text, and a proper representation of said text in their music. The techniques of verse—meter, form, accent, rhyme—were of the highest priority for them. At the end of the day, I imagine all composers, through the ages, would like to avoid accusations of having done wrong by the poet, though whether a setting "serves the text" is ultimately a subjective question. (A more fruitful question might be to ask *how* a setting represents and serves its source material.) It follows that those interested in composing with words ought to learn a bit about poetry, specifically scansion.

Scansion is the process of uncovering a poem's rhythm. It can reveal the pattern of a line,

but it also shines light on the structure of a stanza or even the entire poem. Attempting to “scan” a line yields the best results when reading conventionally metrical, i.e., regular, verse. Most poetry in the English language is *accentual-syllabic*, meaning that two factors govern its organization: the number of stressed syllables in a line, and how those stresses are grouped. The reader’s sense of regularity is reinforced by the recurrence of these factors.

Let us start with the latter factor. Syllables in metrical poetry are grouped together in units called *feet*, which may consist of either two or three syllables.<sup>2</sup> The *disyllabic* former category most commonly appears in the form of iambs (a short, or unstressed, syllable followed by a long one) and trochees (a long syllable followed by a short). For a list of representative foot types and example words, see **Example 1.1**. In the chart, and in some of the further examples below, stressed syllables will be represented by a forward slash (/) and a hyphen (-) will represent shorter, unstressed syllables. Poets also employ a foot consisting of two unstressed syllables called a pyrrhic, and the opposite, a spondee, with two consecutively stressed syllables. The trisyllabic category of foot has a greater number of options, but the most common trisyllabic feet are the dactyl (long, short, short), the amphibrach (short, long, short), and the anapest (short, short, long).<sup>3</sup> In metrical poetry, a reader can expect a stanza to be predominantly constructed of one category of foot, or pattern of feet.

One final relevant idea is that of *rising* and *falling* rhythm. A rising rhythm is constructed of feet whose stress comes at the final syllable, so a passage made up of iambs or anapests is in rising rhythm. Trochees and dactyls, however, place their stress at the beginning of the foot, so they are said to be in falling rhythm, as they descend from the “higher” stress.

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<sup>2</sup> This statement applies only to English verse, as verse from other cultures, notably Greek poetry, may include feet of up to four syllables.

<sup>3</sup> There are additional types of trisyllabic feet, but only three of these pertain to the lion’s share of English verse.

|            |       |                                |
|------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| Iamb       | - /   | “Re- <b>g</b> ard”             |
| Trochee    | / -   | “ <b>Mu</b> -sic”              |
| Spondee    | / /   | “ <b>Ch</b> ild- <b>h</b> ood” |
| Pyrrhic    | - -   | “To a”                         |
| Dactyl     | / - - | “ <b>El</b> -e-phant”          |
| Anapest    | - - / | “Com-pre- <b>h</b> end”        |
| Amphibrach | - / - | “Um- <b>b</b> rel-la”          |

**Example 1.1:** Chart of feet types

The second category, number of stresses per line, may be better described as the number of feet per line. A line of pentameter, for example, consists of five feet; tetrameter consists of four feet; trimeter of three, and so on. Most commonly, English-language poets pair pentameter with iambs—many such examples of iambic pentameter can be found in verses by Alexander Pope, John Milton, and perhaps most famously by William Shakespeare, who employed it in both his sonnets and his stage dramas. Thus, it follows that a reader approaching a metrically regular poem can expect to find not only a consistent *number* of stresses in a line, but also a *regular placement* of the stresses. (This is sometimes called a poem’s “beat.”) For example, in a line of pure iambic pentameter like in **Example 1.2** below, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the stresses fall exclusively on even-numbered syllables. I have included lines (|) to separate the feet from each other in this and the next example as a visual aid.

The literary historian and author Paul Fussell makes the argument that scansion must rely on the manner of natural speech, not on the expectation of rhythm. His book *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* establishes the basis of my approach of scansion, codifying not only the method but also the aims of scansion, and how to understand substitution in the context of a poem (1979,

19–29, 35). When scanning a poem, a reader must not arbitrarily assume the beat will unfailingly remain consistent or that the stresses will even fall in the same places as the previous line.

Imagine that a trochee was inserted at the beginning of a line into an otherwise iambic context.

To blindly steamroll through the trochee risks mangling the natural pronunciation, and also the nuance of the words chosen by the poet. The trochee may represent strength, or weight, or suggest the slowing of momentum, or any number of things which are contextually determined and understood. After all, the role of a good poem is to effect a change in an attentive reader, and what better tool to use than an expressive substitution? In **Example 1.3**, does Donne's initial trochee set against the following iambs not lend extra heft to the blow and harness our attention?

Now, let us turn to the famous passage from Act III, Scene I of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* depicted in **Example 1.4**. The first line is composed strictly of five iambs, and again, the stresses are located on the even-numbered syllables. Curiously, though, a final, eleventh syllable falls at the end of this line, and every line following also possesses this extra unstressed sound.

- / | - / | - / | - / | - /  
 The face of all the world is changed, I think,  
 - / | - / | - / | - / | - /  
 Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
*(Etc.)*  
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole  
  
 Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink

**Example 1.2:** Scansion of "The face of all the world is changed" from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, (1850)

/ - | - / | - / | - / | - /  
 Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you

**Example 1.3:** Initial trochee in John Donne's "Batter my heart," (1609)

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

**Example 1.4:** “To be or not to be,” from Act III, Scene I from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600)

In poetry studies, this is known as a *feminine ending*, an unstressed syllable which only falls at the end of a line and does not clearly belong to the preceding foot, or any foot—it stands alone as an extrametrical syllable.<sup>4</sup>

The second line is almost exactly like the first, but the initial foot (comprised of the word “**wheth**-er”) is pronounced with its stress on the *first* syllable in standard English. To ignore this difference and read it like every other iambic foot would simply be a mispronunciation, so the reader must conclude that the foot is a trochee inserted in the place of an iamb, thus briefly interrupting the rhythm before it resumes its iambic pattern. The third line, like the first, reads in iambic pentameter, again with a feminine ending. The fourth line, though, possesses two substitutions: an initial pyrrhic foot (“or to”) followed by a spondaic foot (“**take arms**”).<sup>5</sup> The effect of these two substitutions in sequence is to accelerate to the spondee, the weightiest foot and the climax of the stanza. The final line here is broken up with a caesura following the first

<sup>4</sup> To contrast this, a line which ends on a lone *stressed* syllable is referred to as a “masculine ending.” While the use of gendered language for stressed and unstressed endings is traditional in poetic analysis, I do not endorse its continued application. Some scholars like Derek J. Myler and Matt Chiu (2021) have already begun to propose alternatives for gendered language in other fields, but this is beyond the scope of the survey at hand.

<sup>5</sup> One might also read “or to” as a trochee, but such a difference is negligible for our purposes.

sentence's completion, then initiates the next thought in the line's latter half. Even so, the dominant rhythm thus far is preserved, regardless of punctuation markings. With a few slight deviations via foot substitution, then, this portion of Shakespeare's monologue is composed of lines of iambic pentameter.

Scanning in the manner of natural speech reveals substitutions and disruptions in an otherwise regular meter, as there is often no other way to correctly read the lines. These moments of disruption, where the poet counterpoints the meter, impact how a reader experiences the line, and is often represented in the music throughout the Western canon. Therefore, to fully appreciate the nuance of a text, composers must be cognizant of both the organization of the poetry (accounting for line and stanza length), but also the natural stresses of the words, and a thorough scansion should uncover these elements. Accents corresponding with stressed syllables, whether agogic or articulated, are appropriate choices, as is singing the syllable at a higher pitch, and these can be further supported by changes in the harmony or texture.

Still, composers through history have not adhered to the exact rhythms of the texts they set. As alluded to earlier, the text undergoes a “sea change” when set to music, and a musical rendering that doggedly clings to the poetic rhythm risks encumbrance or flatness. When composers evade the poet's established beat for expressive effect, these deviations provide a window of insight into how the composer reads and understands the poem. After all, to take a finished work of art and add onto it means that they must have *something* meaningful to say.

Let us briefly turn to pop music for some concrete examples of differing declamatory strategies. First, Eron (2024, 1–2) notes that Katy Perry's 2013 song “Unconditionally” contains an oddity of stress placement: see **Example 1.5a**. In common English, the word “un-con-**di**-tion-al” has its most stressed syllable in the middle, but the text is declaimed with the musical stress

falling on the syllable after. Perry's emphasized syllable is reinforced by metric position, pitch, and agogic accent, which Eron notes was nearly universally perceived by listeners as being rather jarring and unnatural. This is a particularly noticeable deviation from spoken stress, especially because it is the song's hook.<sup>6</sup> Contrast this with the chorus of Sabrina Carpenter's 2024 single "Please Please Please," which contains the line shown in **Example 1.5b**.<sup>7</sup> The spoken emphasis in the word "em-**bar**-rass" does not fall where Carpenter has placed it musically; instead, she chooses to preserve the rhythmic pattern established in the preceding bars, but at least to me, this "transgression" is far less strident than Perry's. While this section *is* a part of the chorus, it is not the song's hook. The unexpectedly stressed syllable does not fall on a downbeat, and Carpenter places the word's true stress on a higher pitch. Therefore, Perry's declamatory strategy comes across as a core, memorable component of the song, and Carpenter's is merely a detail, albeit a humorous one.

In **Example 1.5c**, we see particularly clever declamation from Michael Jackson's single "Dirty Diana" from 1988. The phrase "**dirt**-y Di-**an**-a" contains two stresses, and Jackson sacrifices the first, setting only the second on a strong beat. In doing so, Jackson asserts that one stress is more important than the other.<sup>8</sup> This choice of emphasis places musical stress on the text's ultimate destination ("Di-**AN**-a").

The above is not to say that other aspects of poetic organization should be ignored by composers, but rhyme and alliteration often have less to do with the act of setting a text's

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<sup>6</sup> In defense of Perry, it is important to note that "unnatural" declamation is a core characteristic of the song's verse as well—in the full context of the song, this perceived blemish does not seem so jarring.

<sup>7</sup> I have used the lyrics from the radio edit here so as not to "embarrass" my more polite readers.

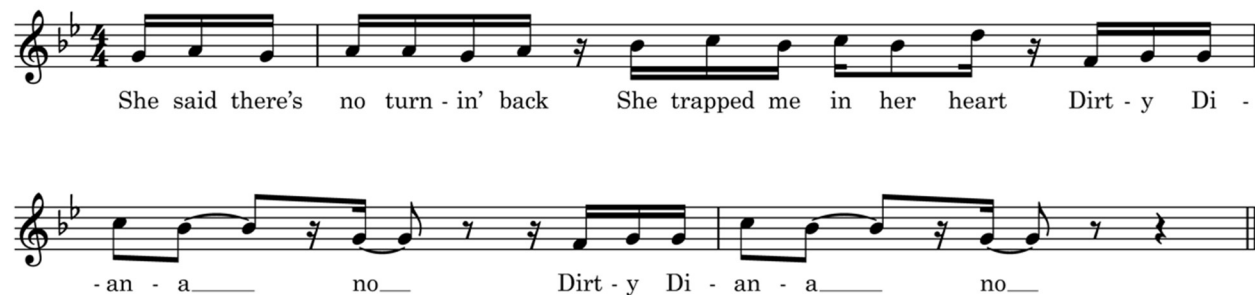
<sup>8</sup> Implicit in this discussion of Jackson's stress prioritization is the concept of hierarchy, or orders of stress. This is a topic that will be briefly explored in Chapter 2.



**Example 1.5a:** The hook from Katy Perry’s “Unconditionally” (2013), unexpected stress marked with exclamation points



**Example 1.5b:** Chorus from Sabrina Carpenter’s “Please Please Please” (2024), unexpected stress marked with exclamation points



**Example 1.5c:** Pre-chorus and chorus from Michael Jackson’s “Dirty Diana” (1987)

metrical framework to a musical one. However, enjambment, the technique of continuing a sentence over a line or stanza break, *is* of special importance to composers, as it changes how the poem flows, and articulates a clearer idea of what the musical phrase ought to be. Generally, poets do not choose punctuation marks arbitrarily, so a lack thereof too informs the reader’s experience: does the poem come off as more frantic, urgent, or breathless when an entire stanza is delivered without pause? And further, even *with* punctuation, can a composer not willfully

ignore a punctuation mark and declaim the text straight through for expressive effect?<sup>9</sup> In the ensuing analyses, we will hope to address questions which will lead to a greater understanding of a composer's declamatory priorities.

### 1.3 The Basic Rhythm of Declamation

A system for measuring such expressive deviations from the expected declamation of regular, metrical poetry in the art song literature has been established by Harald Krebs: the Basic Rhythm of Declamation (BRD). Krebs first published a study of R. Schumann's late songs using the BRD in 2010 in *Indiana Theory Review*.<sup>10</sup> He has since used this system for the analysis of songs by R. Strauss, C. Schumann, and J. Brahms (2010, 2014a, 2014b, and 2018). Krebs's methodology provides a framework for analyzing declamation through the process of recomposing songs strictly according to the text's poetic rhythm, then comparing it to the composer's actual setting. Primarily, this allows us to measure to what extent a song is *BRD-conformant*, but it also may reveal any number of other considerations by the composer.

The first step toward creating a BRD is to understand how Krebs defines it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish inflexible rules about the method of constructing a BRD. By necessity, it is a loose, abstract guideline from which a composer or reciter of poetry may begin; thus, there are numerous possible correct renderings of any BRD (discussed in depth below). We must remember that, according to Krebs, the BRD is "intended to emphasize . . . a rhythm that we perceive aurally as poetry is recited" (2010, 69).

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<sup>9</sup> Many such moments can be found across Western art music, but Brahms especially comes to mind. For example, see the first phrase of op. 84, no. 1, "Sommerabend," or op. 47, no. 3, "Sonntag," mm. 9–16.

<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Murphy (2023) and Fulton (2024) have engaged with Krebs's model in their own studies of text and the relationship to music.

Krebs's system, as originally constructed, is intended for German lyric poetry, and because this style utilizes an accentual-syllabic framework, its key features can be generally defined. The English language bears many similarities to German, and as English poetry before the modern era is similarly constructed, we may also avail ourselves of this system. According to Krebs, the first principle of BRD construction is that the musical rendering allows the poem's words to be correctly pronounced in their language (2010, 69). Next, the BRD should respect the natural stresses of the words and the regularity of those stresses, privileging them with metrical and/or agogic accents. Last, because the feet in the text take approximately the same amount of time to pronounce, rhythmic durations of feet should be consistent throughout the BRD. On the broader scale, lines and stanzas of similar length should also be expected to take up the same amount of "space." In short, the accentual and the durational aspects of a poem will be represented in a well-formed BRD. In pursuit of understanding what this method allows us to uncover, and to better demonstrate this system, I will demonstrate the process of making a BRD. I have chosen Talma's early song "Invocation to the Rain" (1925) with text by an anonymous Hopi author for this example.

The very first step in creating a BRD begins with a natural, speechlike reading of the poem, paying special attention to the stressed syllables. From **Example 1.6** onward, the stressed syllables will now be marked with asterisks.<sup>11</sup>

While this stanza does not fall as easily into a metrical mold like iambic pentameter, one still perceives regularity throughout. While the second and fourth lines contain trisyllables (specifically dactyls), the metrical units throughout place the stress at the beginning of the foot,

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<sup>11</sup> I, like Krebs, adopt the method of Morris Halle and transition to asterisks here to show strictly stressed syllables, as the stressed syllables are more important to my study than the unstressed. Halle uses this in all of his writings on poetic meter and stress, including *Meter in Poetry: A New Theory* (2008), but this study does not engage with the "gridline" proposed in that work.

so they are all in falling rhythm. There is a perceived interruption at the beginning of the third line, by way of an “upbeat”: the word “with” would appear to shift the emphasis onto the back half of the foot. This “anacrusis,” like the feminine ending, would likely be considered by scholars to be an extra-metrical foot. Context is necessary to determine if a syllable should be rightly understood as an “upbeat,” but in this particular foot’s case, the previous line’s ending bolsters this argument: line two culminates with an incomplete foot, the stressed syllable “**corn**,” which makes the reader perceive the following “with” as belonging to and concluding that previous foot. Ergo, scanning “with” as an upbeat preserves the dominant falling rhythm for the entire stanza.

Secondly, this can now be easily adapted into musical rhythmic notation, using equal note values for each syllable (**Example 1.7**). Assigning a meter to these rhythms comes third. Because of the stresses which generally fall on alternating beats, the most obvious choice for a meter here is 2/4; here, however, we are immediately presented with a problem. As seen in **Example 1.8**, if the constant eighth note rhythm continued, this would conflict with the trisyllabic dactyls: unstressed syllables would fall on metrically strong beats, unnaturally emphasizing them.

\*       \*       \*  
 Yellow butterflies,  
 \*       \*       \*       \*  
 Over the blossoming virgin corn,  
      \*       \*       \*  
 With pollen-painted faces  
 \*       \*       \*       \*  
 Chase one another in brilliant throng.

**Example 1.6:** Stanza one of the text used in Talma’s “Invocation to the Rain.” Anonymous Hopi author, published 1903



**Example 1.7:** First line of “Invocation,” represented with basic rhythmic notation



**Example 1.8:** First line of “Invocation,” represented in 2/4. Unexpected stress marked with exclamation points

Therefore, some modification of the note lengths will be necessary to accommodate the dactyls in the second line. The most obvious musical association we have with groups of three are triplets, but if the dactyls were set as triplets, this would conflict with the basic metric framework of simple subdivisions. All of the syllables would fit, and the stressed syllables would still be respected, but the natural, speechlike quality of the line would suffer if the dactyls were represented with triplets. We may find better solutions which adhere more closely to Krebs’s guidelines, like in **Example 1.9**. By preserving the stressed syllable’s length as an eighth note but shortening the two unstressed syllables that follow to sixteenth notes, this better accomplishes our goal of making a speechlike musical depiction of the text (and remaining within our prevailing simple duple meter). I have also inserted a rest following the word “butterflies,” which concludes the line, so that the next stressed syllable falls on a downbeat.



**Example 1.9:** First line of “Invocation,” represented in 2/4, with modifications to account for trisyllables

Neither of these adjustments interfere with the natural quality of this musical rendering. Below, we will find a different metrical solution to account for the trisyllables.

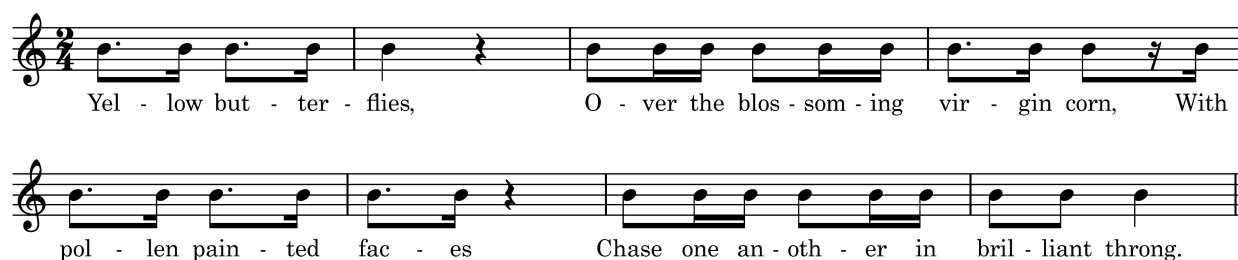
As mentioned above, there are numerous possible non-distortive versions of the BRD. One could elongate the stressed notes, change the meter, and/or insert rests following punctuation marks; below are three more possible BRDs for this text. I have included the final two lines of the stanza in **Examples 1.10a, 1.10b, and 1.10c**. None of these constitute distortion of the natural poetic rhythm, so any would be suitable BRDs. In Example 1.10b, the rhythm in line four is slightly modified to represent the variety of ways the line could be declaimed without causing distortion. In summary, all three of these BRDs have a speechlike quality because they obey the rules of emphasis and pronunciation in their language, metric stress is given to stressed syllables, and the feet, as Krebs (2010, 72) writes, “are associated with equivalent durations.”<sup>12</sup> However, the third of the possibilities, set in compound meter, has an advantage: of the group, it most naturally handles the dactyls in the poem’s second and fourth lines. There is another reason that this version has been selected from the group and will be adopted moving forward, which constitutes another important guideline for choosing a BRD: it is in the same meter as Talma’s setting of the text.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth, now that a meter has been chosen, we may begin to formulate a hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line. Observe the finished product in **Example 1.11**, complete with additional technical notation. Several new parameters have joined our analysis. Most obviously, I have added a melody (as Krebs does) closely resembling the composer’s own vocal line so that

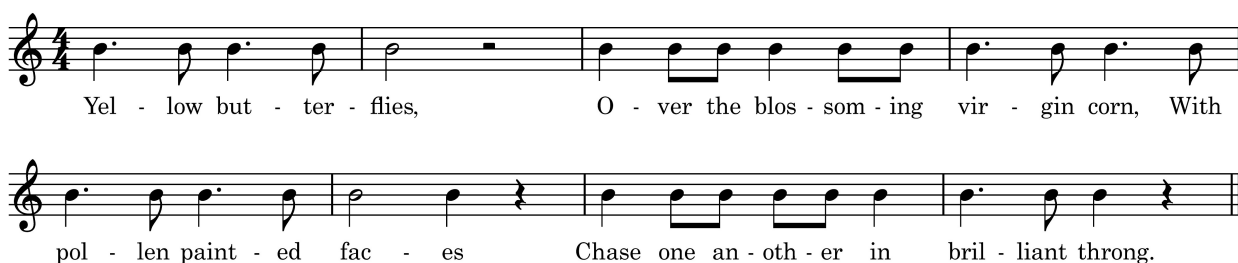
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<sup>12</sup> In all of Krebs’s publications on the BRD, but especially in the initial 2010 article, he expounds on the BRD parameters. Importantly, he goes into greater detail about the treatment of larger poetic units and their correspondence to metric units.

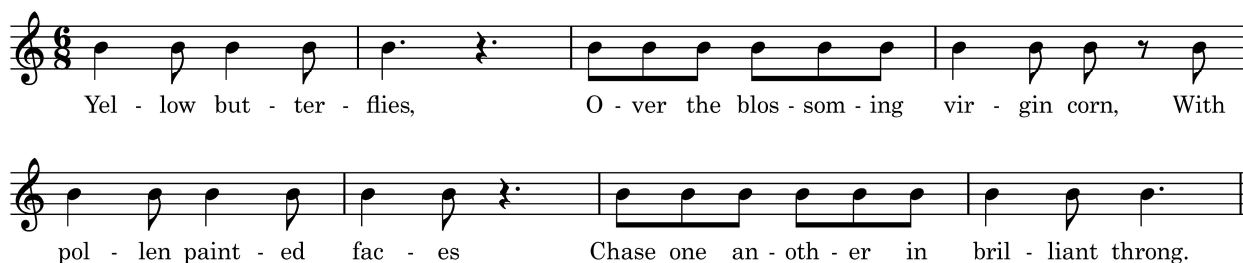
<sup>13</sup> Krebs discusses an example in which the composer’s chosen meter does not align with the BRD in his publication on Brahms (2018, 27–29.)



**Example 1.10a:** One BRD-conformant possibility for the first stanza of “Invocation.” Some stressed syllables are demarcated with dotted rhythms



**Example 1.10b:** Another possibility for the first stanza of “Invocation”, this time represented in 4/4



**Example 1.10c:** A third option to represent the first stanza of “Invocation,” now in 6/8

Example 1.11 shows a musical rendering of a poem in 8/8 time. The notation includes two staves. The first staff contains the lyrics "Yel - low but - ter - flies/ o - ver the blos - som - ing vir - gin corn/ with" and the second staff contains "pol - len paint - ed fac - es/ Chase one an - oth - er in bril - liant thron//". Above the notes are asterisks (\*) indicating foot boundaries. Below the notes are brackets with numbers (3, 3, 3, [3], 3, 3, 3, 1, [1], 1) indicating the Basic Unit of Declamation (BUD) for each syllable. Square brackets with numbers ([3], [1]) indicate the length of silences at the end of lines. Line breaks are marked with slashes (/) and stanza breaks with double slashes (//).

**Example 1.11:** A full hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line for the first stanza of “Invocation,” with additional analytical markings

they may more readily be compared. The next new element brackets the poem’s feet. Each bracket’s number corresponds to the Basic Unit of Declamation (hereafter BUD), which is shown at the top left of the example. Because the BUD is an eighth note, the first foot’s BUD value is three, as it is made up of a quarter note and an eighth note.

Numbers in square brackets may appear following the ends of lines; these measure the length of silences (in BUD value) which represent a natural pause upon concluding a line. When expected rests are omitted, future examples will include a bracketed number with a strikethrough to represent this phenomenon. Finally, line breaks are illustrated with a slash following the final word, and in future examples, stanza breaks will be shown by two consecutive slashes.<sup>14</sup>

Example 1.11 represents a musical rendering of the poem at the most basic level, with due attention paid to the poem’s rhythm. Nearly every foot has a BUD value of three, and of the two shorter values, both are extrametrical units. Line endings can be expected to contain shorter durations, especially if the line’s final syllable does not belong to a complete foot (like the

<sup>14</sup> All of these analytical symbols are first used by Krebs in his original article, except for the line and stanza break slashes. Krebs began to use the line break slashes in his 2014 publication on R. Strauss. Similarly, I adopt his system and introduce the double slashes to make stanzaic separation clearer. Krebs does not use the terms “BUD” or “BUD value.”

aforementioned feminine ending). Extrametrical syllables, like the anacrusis (“with”) in the third line, are also bracketed by themselves, and should be expected to be shorter than their surrounding complete feet. The dactyls in the second and fourth lines, too, are handled naturally by this setting. The rests inserted in the BRD allow the stressed syllables to fall on the strongest beats, even in the third line, which begins with an anacrusis.

As Krebs reminds us, “There is nothing rigid about the basic regularity of the BRD; there is room for irregularity within it” (2014, 9). This irregularity may come in the form of omitted rests at line breaks (where contextually appropriate), or a poem, like the one chosen here, may introduce trisyllables in an otherwise disyllabic format. It is important to note that a metrically regular poem in falling rhythm will tend to stay in falling rhythm, and vice versa.

Having completed the BRD for this text, we may observe and compare Talma’s own setting of this stanza in **Example 1.12**.<sup>15</sup> This setting is certainly not strictly BRD-conformant, but we will begin by examining the elements of the first stanza which adhere most closely to the BRD. First and foremost, Talma’s chosen meter is a logical one, for reasons mentioned above. The stressed syllables throughout the stanza all fall on metrically accented beats. A rest falls in the expected location following the first line. Talma chooses to set the stanza’s second line with a dotted rhythm rather than with consecutive eighth notes, but a slight difference in rhythm does not constitute distortion so long as the BRD’s guidelines are still adhered to. Additionally, a melisma like the one found on the second beat of m. 1 does not result in distortion. Talma’s setting also standardizes the foot length for the first three lines, barring a few exceptions. As discussed above, line endings, especially feminine endings, can be expected to have a smaller BUD value.

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<sup>15</sup> In Preston Leonard’s original engraved copy (2017), the text unfortunately has become misaligned from the music; my example, which is drawn from her engraving, corrects this.

**Example 1.12:** Talma’s actual setting of the first stanza from “Invocation” (1925)

The distortive elements, however, are also plain to see. The most surface-level element, disparities in foot length, provides some insight into Talma’s own reading of the poem.

The final syllable of “**but-ter-flies**” lasts for the duration of four feet—this does not distort the BRD by way of accenting a wholly unstressed syllable, as there is slight emphasis placed on this part of the word, but it does lend some surprising emphasis to the note and disrupts the emerging steady rhythm. It certainly piques my interest that the weaker stress in the word is given greater weight than the word’s primary syllable. Additionally, the BRD inserted a rest following the word “corn” in the second line according to the punctuation (compare Example 1.11). Because this is a sentence fragment, and the text seems to drive toward the following line, it is not truly distortive to omit this rest and connect the lines.

The next legitimate irregularity comes at the end of the stanza’s third line. The final word, “**fac-es**,” has a feminine ending; we would expect the “-es” to last for only one eighth note, but Talma’s setting conspicuously defies this expectation. The weak syllable falls on a beat with a stronger metrical accent than any of the previous unstressed syllables, and its pitch rises to

a local peak. Though this seems a small detail, its slightly longer duration stands out, especially when taken with the preceding measure's rhythmic pattern. While this is not hidden in the score, *I* only noticed these unexpected quirks regarding stress after comparison with the BRD, and further examples below continue to justify its deployment.

We next focus our attention on the stanza's final line, which contains a different kind of distortion that we have not yet extensively discussed. Here, Talma handles the dactyls markedly differently than she did previously: the text's syllabic structure is identical to the second line, but the melody and rhythm recall the first line, rounding off the passage. Further, the foot length is that of two dotted quarter notes, halving the rate of declamation that Talma previously established. There is no clear indication to be found in the text here to suggest a slowing of activity—in fact, Talma chooses to put on the brakes the moment the action actually comes to life so that the initial material returns and is resolved. A setting more like the BRD's seems the more natural example to me, but for a composer known for her tendency to privilege and serve the text, this appears to be a rare exception.

In the broader sense, while this whole passage takes up thirteen measures of music, the amount of musical time Talma takes to declaim each line is different.<sup>16</sup> In our BRD for this stanza, the entire passage only takes up eight bars, with each line declaimed at a pace of two bars per line. In Talma's setting, even though the first line arrives at its final syllable on the downbeat of the phrase's second measure, she elongates that syllable and the second line does not begin until the example's fifth measure. Lines two and three, like the BRD, take up two measures each. Because of the halved declamation, the stanza's final line takes up more space than the preceding two. If not for the added bar of rest and the extended final syllables of "butterflies" and "throng,"

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<sup>16</sup> The thirteenth measure is merely an extension of the preceding note, so one could view it as a much more square group of twelve measures.

this section would only last for 10 bars, and if the rate of declamation in the fourth line were to be standardized, the entire passage would resemble the BRD much more closely. While none of this information is exclusively revealed by the BRD, it all, by process of comparison with the BRD, becomes plainly visible.

As a whole, this is not a terribly distortive stanza—many aspects of it are relatively BRD-conformant, and what deviations there are to be found are straightforward enough. This analysis is relatively adherent to Krebs's model, and this is made easier in part because of the text's metric regularity. In the following chapter, by contrast, we will examine a song whose text is significantly metrically "looser" and explore adaptations and methods for application of Krebs's system, opening the door toward a greater variety of repertoire.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Wallace Stevens and Modernism

In her text selection, Louise Talma preferred a small, exclusive group of poets throughout her life. One of these poets was Wallace Stevens.<sup>1</sup> Stevens, an insurance executive by day, became an influential modernist force in American poetry thanks to his writings. While many of the poems contained within his first book, *Harmonium* (1923), had already appeared individually in magazines, he did not compile and publish them until he was 44. Stevens's subjects are frequently prosaic, but the poems often put forth rather profound, enigmatic, and even shockingly comical observations about the natural world and being.

A preponderance of mundane subjects is to be found in *Harmonium*. For example, as Frank McConnell observes, Stevens's poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream" (1923) is about a woman's death, though this is not truly the central focus of the poem, and is hardly directly acknowledged in the text (1984, 164). Instead, the reader's attention is drawn to the "muscular" fellow, whom the narrator enlists to prepare ice cream for the funeral, among instructing the other guests in their tasks. As Thomas Grey puts forth in his own book, the poem, instead, is a study on coldness itself, contrasting the chilliness of death with the funerary treat (1991, 99–100).<sup>2</sup>

The titles, too, bring up specific expectations of simplicity or "observational poetry," which Stevens goes on to subvert. For example, one of his most celebrated long works, "The Comedian as the Letter C" (1923), explores the very nature of human consciousness, yet

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<sup>1</sup> Other poets who enjoyed this privilege were Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Donne, although the greatest number of texts set by Talma are of Stevens.

<sup>2</sup> For additional critical and analytical readings of Stevens, see Vendler 1969 and 1984. Additional resources include Serio 2007, McConnell 1984 (160–69), Grey 1991, Walzer 2000 (45–53), and Taylor 1991 (209–28.)

possesses a rather disarming title. Depending on the critic's interpretation, the poem entitled "Ploughing on Sunday" (1919) is either about a rejection of religion or a dismissal of old-world European values about fine art. Occasionally, Stevens's verse directly addresses the subject matter in the title but avoids it in the text: the poem "Of the Surface of Things" (1919) describes, in three brief stanzas, the reconciliation of imagination with reality, again through the metaphor of merely observing and walking through the world.<sup>3</sup>

Though Stevens's most visionary works in subject and content are often long poems paired with a traditional (but somewhat malleable) meter, Stevens's other, shorter works venture into less regular metrical territory (Walzer 2000, 47). Observe an excerpt of the first stanza of "Domination of Black" (**Example 2.1**).

How is one meant to scan this? By relying simply on natural speech, the most obvious stresses emerge, and rising rhythm seems to dominate. But there is no regularity in the kinds of feet, and numbering the feet in a line becomes a murky process (there are *usually* two?). For the

At night, by the fire,  
The colors of the bushes  
And of the fallen leaves,  
Repeating themselves,  
Turned in the room,  
Like the leaves themselves  
Turning in the wind.

**Example 2.1:** Excerpt from stanza one of Wallace Stevens's "Domination of Black" (1916)

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<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, Talma set this text in 1927. An engraved copy of it can be found in Preston Leonard's compendium of Talma's songs, printed under the title "On the Surface of Things" (2017, 31–4.) I can find no other version of this poem published with this title.

\*                      \*  
 At night, by the fire,  
 \*        ?        \*  
 The colors of the bushes  
 \*        \*        \*  
 And of the fallen leaves,  
 \*                      \*  
 Repeating themselves,  
 \*                      \*  
 Turned in the room,  
 \*                \*                \*  
 Like the leaves themselves  
 \*        ?        \*  
 Turning in the wind.

**Example 2.2:** Scansion of the stanza one excerpt from “Domination of Black,” with question marks to denote spurious stressed syllables

first four lines of the poem, the second syllable is stressed, but Stevens abruptly interrupts this pattern. Additionally, the initial notion that there are only two stresses in each line begins to fall into doubt. One might classify the word “of” in lines two and three as a lower-order stress, beneath the importance of the clearly ruling “**bush-es**” and “**leaves.**”<sup>4</sup> In poetry from the modernist era and after, such problems raise the question of where a stress belongs in a hierarchy, and if scansion may even hold up.

Even still, **Example 2.2** contains my scansion of “Domination of Black.”<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, this excerpt primarily makes use of rising rhythm, but seems to freely move between di- and trisyllables. I have marked the more contentious syllables, which may or may not truly be stressed, with question marks. When the second line is recited, a slight emphasis can be heard on

<sup>4</sup> Higher, and thus lower, order stress in English verse has been explored by scholars such as Otto Jespersen (1979, 105–28) and stress in the English language at large has been studied by Morris Halle and Noam Chomsky (1968).

<sup>5</sup> Talma also set this text to music, which can be found in the collection mentioned above (2017, 232–39).

the syllable “of.” The “of” in the following line seems to rise to the level of normal stress based on its metric position; each second syllable thus far has been a clear stress, and the fifth line’s counterpointing of this pattern seems to make a stronger case than suggesting Stevens also varies the beat here. The second uncertain syllable comes in the final line of this excerpt, following the word “turning.” Like the other disputed word in line two, a slight emphasis accompanies this syllable when spoken. For the purposes of scansion in this study, stresses of a lower order will still be counted as stressed syllables, and the feet will be classified accordingly.

With the addition in line two, which we may understand as a stress of a lower order, the ordering of the feet in the first half becomes less impenetrable: iambs abound, with occasional anapests. The first four lines are symmetrical in their metrical organization; the first and fourth lines are comprised of an iamb and an anapest, and lines two and four are made up of three iambs. It is important to note here that even if the word “of” in the second line is not as stressed as the surrounding emphasized syllables, for the purposes of scansion in this study, it will still be counted as a stress, and I will classify the feet accordingly. The initial stress in line five, fittingly on the word “turned,” begins to shift the poem into falling rhythm. The foot following “turned in” is in fact an iamb, but the remaining feet in this section cannot be read as anything but trochees (or masculine endings).

With these adjustments, a greater sense of regularity in the poem begins to emerge, and one may begin to view this as a kind of “flexible blank verse,” rather than true “free verse.” A pattern begins to establish itself, in some form, though it is not one recognized by the centuries of poetry which came before Stevens. Dennis Taylor acknowledges Stevens’s tendency to reference existing forms in his poems, calling them “invisible” or “apparitional” meters (1991, 209). On first sight, Stevens’s 1954 poem “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” appears to

be loosely referential to haiku, but no stanzas strictly follow the form’s syllabic pattern, and many of them depart from the three-line format. In other cases, Stevens shrouds what *would* be a regular beat with line breaks. Taylor also notes that his use of meter is often specific to the poem’s intentions; for example, when the subject is obfuscated, so, too, is the meter.<sup>6</sup>

Let us return to “Domination of Black,” examining the following (and final) three lines of the first stanza. While our ability to scan such a passage was in question for the first portion, we found a suitable reading that preserves regularity; in **Example 2.3**, this is less feasible. Here, I have again marked syllables whose level of emphasis cannot concretely be ascertained with question marks. The first line, ignoring the second word, seems to be comprised of falling feet (like the preceding text). Curiously, the placement of the word “but” after the colon certainly suggests that the feet are not clear-cut entities: the colon implies they should be separate. An aural rendition of this poem would surely observe this punctuation, so they would not be perceived as belonging to the same foot. If the word “but” is a stressed syllable, which might be the result of a natural reading, then that strands the first syllable on its own—can we honestly call that strongly accented moment an upbeat?

The second line shown here is by far the shortest of the stanza, and the word “came” also may or may not be stressed in the manner of speech. If we interpret this as a stress, is the line

|                                           |   |  |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| *                                         | ? |  | * | * | * | * |
| Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks  |   |  |   |   |   |   |
|                                           |   |  | ? | * |   |   |
| Came striding.                            |   |  |   |   |   |   |
| ?                                         | * |  |   | * |   | * |
| And I remembered the cry of the peacocks. |   |  |   |   |   |   |

**Example 2.3:** Final three lines of the first stanza of “Domination of Black,” with scansion

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor uses “The Ordinary Women” to demonstrate hidden regularity (210), and the final section of Stevens’s “Study of Two Pears” as an example of impenetrable obscurity to match the content (218).

then a spondee with a feminine ending, or is it a trochee beginning with another marooned long syllable? Or could it be that this is all one amphibrachic foot?<sup>7</sup> The stanza's final line introduces the poem's pseudo-refrain, and seems not to include an obvious stress until the middle of the word "re-**mem**-ber." If the line's initiating word is viewed as an upbeat, and the "I" as a stress, then the line falls into a regular rhythm, combining trochees and dactyls. As a whole, the stanza proceeds from short lines ranging from five to seven syllables to its bizarrely proportioned final segment; the final three lines contain both the briefest and lengthiest groups by far.

It becomes clear that any attempt to perform a strict reading of poetry like the above will be plagued with interruptions. The modernist (and greatly effective) substitutions of feet, disordered syllables, and unequally balanced lineation all pose analytical issues. Perhaps most importantly, the greatest challenge to overcome in scanning this repertory is pervasive uncertainty.

## 2.2 Adapting the BRD

All of this is to say that Wallace Stevens, in the poems described above (and many others, especially his shorter poems), follows in the American poetic tradition of innovation, and his contribution to this rich history comes in the free mixing, obscuring, and sometimes abandonment of meter. Because of this loosely metered nature, his work is an ideal candidate for applications of the BRD, and all of its trappings, into new territory.

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<sup>7</sup> The answer to this question comes, in my interpretation, near the bottom of the poem's final stanza (not pictured). The third-to-last line uses similar language, as Stevens does throughout this poem, to describe the encroaching darkness in iambs: "Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks." That Stevens clarifies for us at the poem's end how we ought to read the beginning, I think, does not change the fact that a definitive scansion of this segment is quite difficult.

To do so, however, there will need to be a number of adjustments made to Krebs's system. As we have discussed, a scansion becomes difficult in this style, and the guiding principle for this must be identifying a line's stresses. We will perform a full analysis of Talma's setting of Stevens's "Infanta Marina" later, but for now, I will excerpt the first two stanzas from the beginning of this poem, which variously alludes to an ambiguous figure who might be a woman, a sailboat, or merely a lyrical representation of the natural world.<sup>8</sup> See **Example 2.4** for a preliminary scansion of the text. As can be seen, the majority of the section seems to be in rising rhythm, but there are still a number of large gaps which seem to lack clear stresses to reinforce regularity.

To reveal a greater regularity in this poem, **Example 2.5** contains a scansion with “`” to denote such weaker stresses (i.e., stresses of a lower order). Primarily, two criteria impacted my decision to determine these. The first is their part of speech. In this case, many of the lesser stresses are either linking verbs or prepositions.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, I have also considered their metric

\*                          \*

Her terrace was the sand

\*                          \*

And the palms and the twilight.

\*                          \*                          \*

She made of the motions of her wrist

\*        \*                \*

The grandiose gestures

\*

Of her thought.

**Example 2.4:** Stanzas one and two of Wallace Stevens’s “Infanta Marina” (1921), with scansion

<sup>8</sup> Preston Leonard suggests that this figure may be a mermaid or other female sea creature (2011, 211).

<sup>9</sup> Conjunctions are also common parts of speech in this group.

\*        \        \*

Her terrace was the sand

\*        \*        \*

And the palms and the twilight.

\*        \        \*        \        \*

She made of the motions of her wrist

\        \*        \*

The grandiose gestures

\        \*

Of her thought.

**Example 2.5:** Scansion of stanzas one and two from “Infanta Marina,” including lower-order stress

placement within the lines, accounting for where a stress might be positioned within a more regular pattern.<sup>10</sup> The result of these adjustments reveals an underlying framework that, for the lion’s share of the poem, provides stresses in the expected positions.

Neither instance of the word “and” in the second line is scanned here as a lower order stress. This may seem unorthodox, as they fall in metrically advantageous places, and similar words like “of” are elevated to this status elsewhere. The problem is that scanning them in this line as trochees will offset the meter of the rest of the line (**Example 6**).<sup>11</sup> This, to me, seems very unnatural and unspeechlike, and obscures the line’s thought: the two instances of “and the”

/        - | /        - |        - / | -

And the palms and the twilight.

**Example 2.6:** Hypothetical initial trochee in the second line of “Infanta Marina,” with stress markers

<sup>10</sup> This becomes more complex when there are stress hierarchies in the same word, like in “grandiose.” I asked a number of passersby in a library how they pronounce this somewhat controversial word, and the results were such that it contained a slight emphasis on the first syllable, a clear de-emphasis on the second, and the strongest stress placed upon the third syllable.

<sup>11</sup> So as to make the hypothetical trochaic reading explicitly clear, I return to the initial stress markers from Chapter 1 for this example.

lead to the following strong syllables “**palms**” and “**twi**-light” respectively, but a trochaic reading hampers this. One could also read both pairs of “and the” as pyrrhics, but this is also problematic: the stressed syllable “palms” is left as an incomplete foot in the middle of the line, which according to the traditional rules of scansion is not permissible.<sup>12</sup> The reading with rising trisyllabic insertion (“and the **palms**”) preserves the extant meter and does not necessitate other adjustments—it seems the most natural and unproblematic, so we will proceed with this understanding.

This deeper analysis also uncovers the shadow of metrical regularity lurking beneath the surface. The first stanza is split into two lines, but when viewed as one continuous line (as the thought implies), it is a line of iambic pentameter with two trisyllabic substitutions at the line’s end. The first line of the second stanza, meanwhile, also contains five stresses, but the second stress reverses the order and transforms it into a group of trochees. A combination of the brief second line and the stanza’s final line additionally yields five stresses. Like the stanza’s opening line, this combination begins with iambs, then switches midway through to falling rhythm. We may now perceive that Stevens disguises his balanced metrical units with line and stanza breaks. The repeated shift from falling to rising rhythm, as well as the uneven lineation and “hidden” meters, will remain a feature of the rest of the poem, and our analytical system must be prepared to accommodate these.

We also must be prepared to account for lower-level stresses in our analysis. Krebs’s system does not expound on lower-level stresses, but a core component is of *higher-order* stress

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<sup>12</sup> It must be acknowledged here that the rules of scansion need be applied responsibly to this repertory of verse (or really, any preceding style of verse), as an overly strict view would impose constraints on the poet and admonish innovation. Because there are no other examples of stressed syllables with seemingly incomplete feet in the middle of the line in the text at hand, I have decided to proceed with a traditional analysis.

and its implications.<sup>13</sup> In this survey, that aspect of the BRD has been dispensed with. As discussed above, a scansion of the basic stresses and meter of a line of so-called “free verse” can be difficult and inconclusive on its own, and it may be impossible to convincingly determine which of the stresses belong to the highest order. I have exchanged this system for an acknowledgement of the lesser stresses, as I believe these help clarify Stevens’s forms and help to visualize regularity for the creation of BRDs.

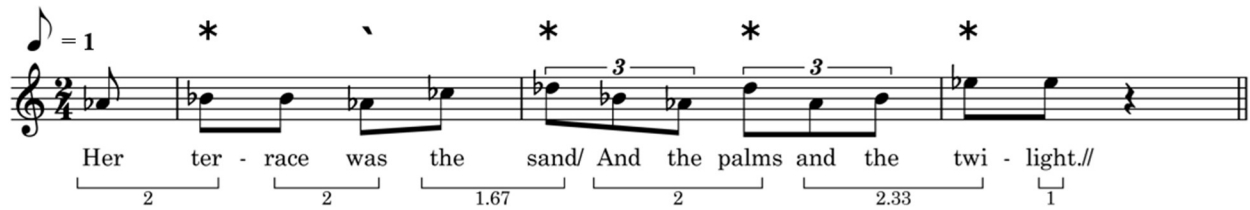
Now that we have established a scansion, we may begin to create a BRD for this passage. Because of the disyllables, any simple meter will suffice, but we will use 2/4 as it is relevant to Talma’s setting of the text. As discussed above, there are always multiple possible BRDs for a text. Still, this survey aims to establish a series of guidelines for situations such as these so that the BRD can be applied to a greater selection of the repertoire. The first line seems straightforward enough, as it is comprised entirely of iambs, but the second line immediately presents issues: how should the two anapests be notated in the most logical way? A few possibilities can be seen in **Examples 2.7a, 2.7b, and 2.7c**, including an approximation of the composer’s chosen vocal melody.

The ending of the first line results in the present quandary: how should the unstressed syllables following “sand” be declaimed? A successful BRD rendering would ensure that the following stress lands on a strong beat, preserving the perceived meter (and BUD) without interrupting the flow of the text, and while attempting to keep the foot length approximately the same.<sup>14</sup> Example 2.7a addresses this by setting the text in eighth note triplets. Example 2.7b

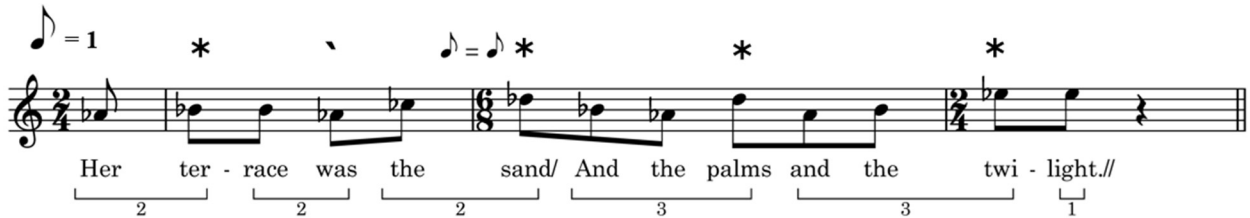
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<sup>13</sup> One such implication is that stresses of the higher order belong in the *most* metrically advantageous positions, like downbeats and at the beginning of hypermetrical phrases, in hypothetical BRD-compliant settings. Several examples concerned with higher-order stress can be found in Krebs 2010 (72–79) and 2018 (17–22).

<sup>14</sup> Because the first line seems to flow into the second, the presence of too many rests in a BRD would disrupt the text’s cadence.



**Example 2.7a:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the first stanza of “Infanta Marina,” with triplets



**Example 2.7b:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the first stanza of “Infanta Marina,” with a meter change



**Example 2.7c:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the first stanza of “Infanta Marina,” with the word “palms” elongated

similarly turns to elements of compound meter to set these trisyllables, briefly changing the meter to 6/8. The third option here, Example 2.7c, inserts a brief rest and positions the unstressed parts of the anapest in a weak place, further emphasizing the line’s long syllables.

The result (and well-suitedness) of each option can be tested by reading it aloud. The first of the group (Example 2.7a) preserves the basic metrical framework in the sense that it does not alter the number of beats in the measure, but even though the music stays in 2/4, the beat’s manner of subdivision crucially changes. The actual flow of the text accelerates artificially, and the BUD value becomes unorthodox. Example 2.7b severely distorts the metrical framework by

changing meters, but the BUD's regularity ensures the speechlike text, and the foot length is approximately what one expects (the anapests have a BUD value of 3, of course, not 2).

Both of these models, in my estimation, are inferior to Example 2.7c. The third option maintains all of the metrical aspects of the text: strong syllables fall on strong beats, the musical meter is undisturbed, and the rhythm and cadence is kept regular and consistent. The shortcoming here is in the irregularity of the foot lengths, but as addressed above, this is not so severe a flaw. I would go so far as to count this as a feature (or necessary adaptation) of applying the BRD to modernist verse, given that it seems feet are not structured equally in the texts themselves: foot lengths in the BRD will be adjusted to account for the number of syllables (i.e. trisyllables may be expected to have longer values than disyllables), but aberrations are still considered distortive.<sup>15</sup>

A hypothetical BRD-conformant setting of the second stanza can be found in **Example 2.8a**.<sup>16</sup> This stanza, despite its multiple reversals of rhythm, is relatively uncomplicated. The higher order stresses all fall on downbeats, except for at the conclusion of the second line. There, the first syllable of “grandiose” lands naturally on the measure’s first beat, but I can find no alternative which does not cause greater issues elsewhere: **Example 2.8b** shows a possibility with an extra beat of rest inserted to accommodate the stressed syllable in “gran-di-ose,” but this offsets the rest of the line’s strong stresses, and to then account for this with more rests would disrupt the natural flow and thus be inappropriate for a hypothetical BRD-compliant line.

Above, we have discussed the kinds of modifications necessary to the BRD system to properly analyze settings of a certain branch of modernist poetry. Some discrepancy in foot

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<sup>15</sup> The foot length in Example 2.7a is still a weakness, as it implies the poetic meter is profoundly different here and the BUD is poorly suited for it.

<sup>16</sup> There is also some disparity in the foot lengths in this example because of the quarter notes, but I do not consider these distortive, as the line becomes disconnected without them.



**Example 2.8a:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the second stanza of “Infanta Marina”



**Example 2.8b:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the second stanza of “Infanta Marina,” with a rest inserted following the first line

length is permissible (and even likely) in hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal lines, and of the variety of possibilities with new metric trends in verse that can be represented in music, the best are those that preserve the BUD and the meter (and thus speechlike integrity.) Further possible applications and modifications of the BRD will be discussed in the final portion of this chapter.

## 2.3 Talma’s Setting of “Infanta Marina”

Having discussed the necessary modifications to the BRD, we will now proceed to a series of comparisons between our BRD and Talma’s setting of the same section of text.<sup>17</sup> We shall proceed stanza-by-stanza, and going forward, hypothetical BRD examples will not include brackets under every foot when the duration is regular (or is shorter in an expected place, like at

<sup>17</sup> The complete score for this song (including piano accompaniment) is included in an appendix to this document.

line endings with incomplete feet). Notable sections will continue to be shown in detail.

Examples 2.7c and 2.8a represent a hypothetical BRD-conformant setting of the text; Talma's actual setting of the first two stanzas can be seen in **Example 2.9**.

Immediately, we observe striking differences between the BRD and Talma's actual work.<sup>18</sup> In the most general sense, there is a massive disparity in foot lengths. In the first stanza, every single complete foot is comprised of a different BUD value, and generally does not resemble the BRD. The first line declaims the text quite briskly, then gradually slows down as it nears the word "twilight"; note how the BUD value (unevenly) lengthens as the line advances. Talma also handles the latter half of line two with triplets, something we previously described as "unnatural" when rendering a BRD of this section. It is certainly significant that Talma does exactly what we determined earlier to be distortive of perceivable meter in this switch from simple to compound division. I believe Talma intends to use this slowing of declamation to describe the location depicted by the text, as the scope of the environment expands outward. The rhythms (and the ascending pitch) help us take in the scene: first we notice the sands, then the tips of the palm trees, and as our gaze broadens, we may finally observe the twilight atmosphere's entirety.

At this point, readers may wonder if I was mistaken to select an eighth note as the BUD and not a sixteenth note. The reason becomes clear in Talma's second stanza. Here, the BUD values become relatively standard in eighth notes, and in fact are identical to the BRD in the first and third lines: the rate of declamation has effectively been halved. In the second line Talma sets a massive melisma on the word "grandiose," an obvious example of text-painting whose pitch

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<sup>18</sup> Regrettably, this work, and none of the other songs from its collection, have been commercially recorded. I am continually hopeful that a reader of this document shall take it upon themselves to remedy this.

Her terr - ace was the sand/ and the palms and the twi - light//

mo - tions of her wrist/ The gran - - di - ose ges - tures/ Of her thought.//

**Example 2.9:** Talma’s setting of stanzas one and two of “Infanta Marina,” (1988)

comes to a local peak, but curiously, the extended syllable “gran-” is *not* the word’s strongest syllable. Furthermore, it reflects the BRD in its necessary misplacement of the higher-order stress on the weaker beat (compare Example 2.8a). However, all the syllables still fall on *relatively* “correct” beats; the expected stronger syllables are both declaimed on beats one and two, and the de-emphasized middle syllable happens in a metrically weak place and is sung for the shortest rhythmic value—it is really not so “grandiose” a gesture as it might seem, at least in its declamation.<sup>19</sup>

In this stanza, the hierarchy of stresses is exactly compliant to the BRD, down to the setting of “grandiose gestures.” For a discussion of phrase length (and the amount of time it takes Talma to set an entire line or stanza), let us return to our BRD for these stanzas. The first stanza is comprised of two lines and our BRD declaims this in four bars; the second stanza is three lines and is correspondingly two measures longer. Talma’s setting differs from this, spending only three bars on the first stanza, and approximately seven in the second; this and the BRD are roughly proportional to each other. The elongation of “grandiose” constitutes an extra two beats,

<sup>19</sup> The BUD value for the foot “-di-ose” is also identical to the BRD here.

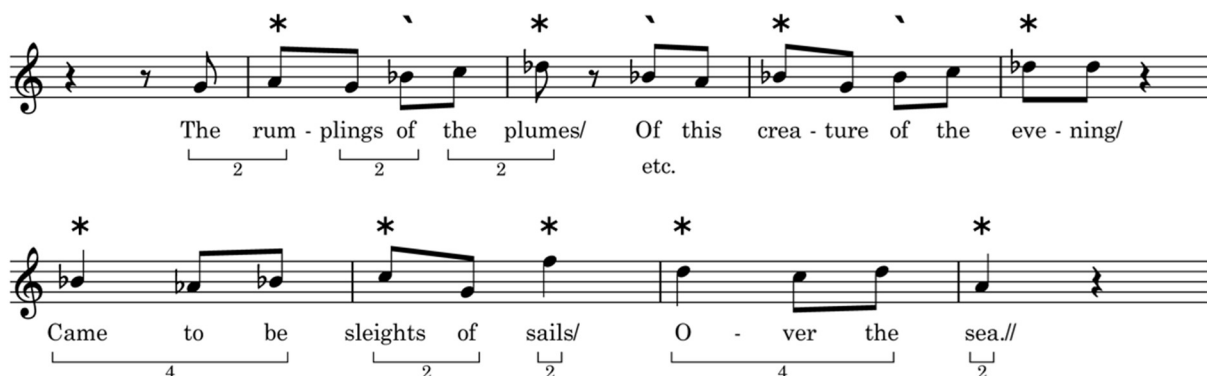
thus accounting for the “missing” fourth measure of the first stanza. Ergo, Talma’s setting thus far is surprisingly BRD-conformant, only distorting the most basic element with disparity in foot length: like with Stevens, underlying regularity is hidden beneath the “grandiose” surface.

A stress analysis of stanza three can be located in **Example 2.10**, and a hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line is included in **Example 2.11**. As before, the word “of” becomes elevated to a higher position in the stress hierarchy partially due to its metrical placement, but also because of the special role it seems to serve in this poem: of its seventy-two words, ten of these are “of,” and its appearance throughout becomes a sort of micro-refrain. The precise feet of lines three and four here may be in question; “Came to be sleights of sails” could either be scanned as “dactyl, trochee, masculine ending” or “trochee, iamb, iamb.” Line four, similarly, could either be read as a dactyl and an incomplete stressed foot (as pictured) or as a trochee followed by a dactyl. As stated above, metric ambiguity is a feature of this poem (perhaps an ebb and flow of the tides described within), and neither option significantly impacts the BRD or our analysis. In either interpretation, there are also collectively five stresses among the two lines, another hidden bit of regularity hidden in the lineation.

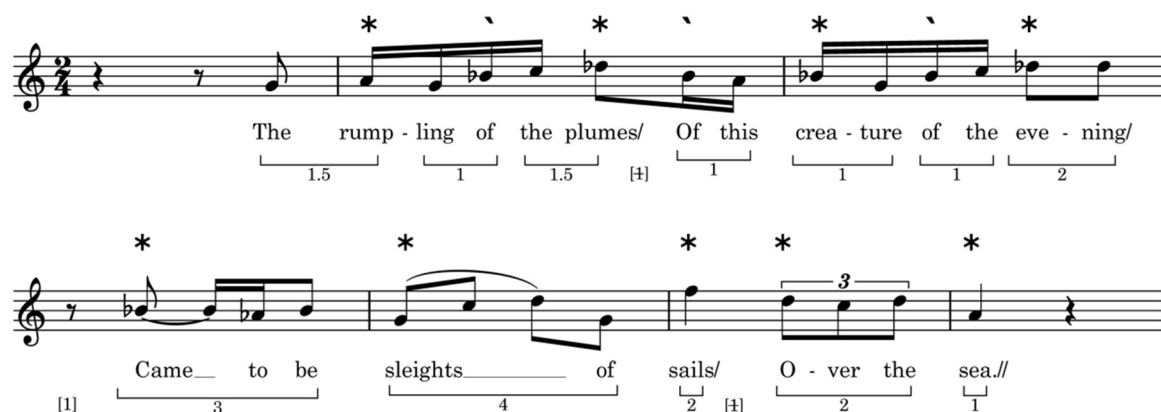
Talma declaims this stanza most similarly to the song’s beginning, returning to the quick declamation of stanza 1 (**Example 2.12**). In the latter half, the declamation again slows, and a

|      |                |                |
|------|----------------|----------------|
| *    | 、              | *              |
| The  | rumpling       | of the plumes  |
| 、    | *              | 、 *            |
| Of   | this creature  | of the evening |
| *    | *              | *              |
| Came | to be sleights | of sails       |
| *    | *              |                |
| Over | the sea        |                |

**Example 2.10:** Scansion of stanza three from “Infanta Marina”



**Example 2.11:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the third stanza of “Infanta Marina”



**Example 2.12:** Talma’s setting of stanza three from “Infanta Marina”

melisma emerges, though this time a far less florid one. The rest at the beginning of line three offsets the stressed syllable “came,” positioning it on an upbeat—the song’s first syncopated rhythm. It could simply be that Talma decided that this was a needed break from rhythmic regularity, but I am inclined to think that this syncopation has more to do with the text and stress ambiguity. One possibility is that the suddenness of the creature’s plumes surprises and unbalances the narrator, resulting in the offbeat entrance. Another could simply be that she detected metrical ambiguity in the sudden trisyllable following a line of duple groups and emphasized it thus.

When the first and third stanzas are compared, the relative contour, rate of declamation (and the way it slows), melodic peak at the same pitch level, and even the presence of a melisma in an otherwise completely syllabic setting demonstrates that these two are cut from the same cloth. This time, though, the phrase lengths are not equivalent: whereas the BRD declaims one line in two measures on average (with exceptions due to inconsistent length of line), this four-line segment in Talma's setting is two bars shorter than expected.<sup>20</sup> We may additionally observe a general tendency for the rate of declamation to slow approaching the end of a line as well; perhaps this is why Talma chose to set "over the" in the fourth line as triplets rather than a quarter note with two eighths, as this may have oversaturated the stanza with heavier declamation.

The final two stanzas will be studied together below. **Example 2.13a** contains a hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line for these, and **Example 2.13b** contains Talma's setting. In the text alone, stanza four is another group of five stresses, all in rising rhythm (I read "in the **roam-**" as an anapest). The first two lines of stanza five are also equivalent to one line of iambic pentameter. The BRD here is relatively straightforward. In the final stanza's second line, to avoid inserting an overlong rest, the word "of" is given greater metrical emphasis than the stress of "**eve-**ning" (though it is sung at a higher pitch and receives due emphasis this way).

Talma's setting of these stanzas, however, is once again distortive in its pacing. It begins similarly to the BRD, but importantly on a pickup to a downbeat, not a weaker beat, and if the pace here were maintained, the weaker stresses would begin to fall on the downbeats. Talma offsets this potential reversal of stress by shifting back into the sixteenth note rhythm with variable foot length. Additionally, the first impactful omitted rest between lineation occurs here:

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<sup>20</sup> Even when the piano part (visible in the Appendix) is considered, this entire phrase doesn't last an entire eight-measure duration.

And thus she roamed/ In the roam - ings of her fan// Par - tak - ing of the sea/ And  
 2 3 3 2 3 etc. 3

of the eve - ning/ As they flowed a - round/ And ut - tered their sub - sid - ing sound//  
 3 3 3 3 3

**Example 2.13a:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the fourth and fifth stanzas of “Infanta Marina”

And thus she roamed/ in the roam - ings of her fan// Par -  
 2 2 1.5 1 2 [H] 1

-tak - ing of the sea/ And of the eve - ning/ As they  
 1 1 2 [H] 1 1.5 1 2.5

flowed a - round/ And ut - tered their sub - sid - ing sound.  
 2.5 2 1 1 6.5 4

**Example 2.13b:** Talma’s setting of the fourth and fifth stanzas from “Infanta Marina”

the fourth stanza goes directly into the fifth, contrasting with the deference Talma has previously given to Stevens’s organization. Based on her setting, Talma reads the first two lines of stanza five as belonging more with the previous stanza, a reasonable position to hold given that they each are comprised of five stresses, and the text from stanza to stanza seems to be connected quite strongly here—the first two lines of the fifth continue to illustrate the murky figure’s roamings.

This section contains a number of meter changes as well; these are not the first in the entire song, but the first that occur while the singer is not resting. First, the opening line of the final stanza takes place mostly in a measure of 5/8. I understand this as a brief composed-in ritardando, encouraging the singer to savor the song's dramatic peak on the word "sea."<sup>21</sup> Additionally, this properly positions the stronger stress on the downbeat in the following measure, a feat the BRD failed to achieve.

The second meter change comes with the poem's final two lines: Talma inserts a bar of 3/4 here, before another text-painting melisma on the penultimate word: "subsiding." This melisma follows the same approximate contour as the earlier melisma on "grandiose," but the rhythm has been halved, like the speed of declamation between stanzas one and two—the grandiose gestures subside.

On the surface level, the added beat of the 3/4 measure allows her to maintain the previous rate of declamation and stress the syllables she recognizes as the strongest (i.e., so that the subsequent melisma begins on the strong beat); however, this seems to be an incomplete explanation, given that the BRD-compliant rendering demonstrates that sixteenth notes are not necessary to accomplish this. If Talma maintained steady eighth notes (or the dotted pattern earlier that measure), "subsiding" could have been set identically as it is in published version. So, why? My understanding is thus: this moment is another example of Talma's subtle manipulation of text declamation to embody the words. The sound of the plumes does not "subside" as substantially as it does without the preceding sixteenth notes, and beyond that, the word "utter" is more closely associated with sounds that are quick and quiet, not belabored or drawn out. As before, the rate of declamation migrates from the vigorous to the resigned. Just as Wallace

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<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, this passage also contains the only instances of a vocal glissando I have found in any of Talma's songs (or otherwise vocal music). I cannot perceive any particular textual impetus for Talma's requested effect here.

Stevens shifts the rhythm of his verse like the tides in this poem, Talma too oscillates between the two predominant rhythmic motives as her vehicle of text declamation.

The BRD does not necessarily *divulge* all of the above findings, but it certainly does illuminate the elements of declamation, allowing us to glean salient information and thus facilitating this path of analysis. There is, of course, more to say about the musical content of this song: Preston Leonard identifies it as one which possesses the typical characteristics of Talma's style, with a concise discussion of some melodic and harmonic features as well (2017, 211). The above study examines how Talma adapts the verse and its atmosphere into the sung declamation, but the piano accompaniment's role in bringing the text to life is hardly acknowledged.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the general contour of most melodic phrases forms long arcs which gently rise and fall. There is little of the disjunct and angular in the vocal line, but the particular moments where the contour shifts could be an avenue of inquiry for this work, or across the collection of nine songs it is contained within (also called *Infanta Marina*, published 1993), or of her earlier works.

## 2.4 Talma's Declamatory Priorities

The remaining analytical thrust of this survey will briefly examine selected moments from other songs by Talma whose declamatory strategies are of particular interest. The first we will examine is another Stevens setting from around the same time, "Lunar Paraphrase."<sup>23</sup> A potential BRD-conformant rendering is presented next to Talma's actual setting in **Examples**

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<sup>22</sup> For example, the piano accompaniment outlines triads in the upper voices throughout the song, but often pairs these with a dissonant bass note. Various "hierarchies" of dissonance and consonance could be mapped out and measured against the work's phrase rhythm, text and atmosphere, etc. Also, one may observe the tendency to progress from a sparse, pseudo-consonant accompaniment to a thick, dissonant texture and then back over the course of a phrase, for example in mm. 14–20 or 27–31.

<sup>23</sup> My excerpts here are adapted from Preston Leonard's anthology of Talma's songs (2017, 245–48.) This song, written in 1988, is the fifth of the *Infanta Marina* collection. The entire poem may be found online.

The moon is the moth - er of pa - thos and pit - y.//  
 When, at the wea - ri - er end of No - vem - ber/ Her  
 old light moves a - long the branch - es/

**Example 2.14a:** Hypothetical BRD-compliant vocal line for the first three lines of Wallace Stevens's "Lunar Paraphrase" (1918)

The moon is the moth - er of pa - thos and  
 pit - y.// When, at the wea - ri - er end of No -  
 vem - ber/ Her old light moves a - long the bran - ches/

**Example 2.14b:** Talma's setting of the first three lines of "Lunar Paraphrase" (1988)

**2.14a and 2.14b.** This poem is quite regular in its meter, with few interruptions or reversals of rhythm: accounting for pickups (like in the first line), falling meter dominates.<sup>24</sup> The poem's third line, however, abruptly shears one syllable off the previous trisyllabic feet; these new disyllabic feet are represented with a meter change in the BRD. Because we have not yet encountered a BRD which includes two different meters in the same rendering, I will elaborate: I believe that the most basic, natural way to declaim this poem *includes* this shift to 2/4 because there is no other natural way to declaim it which preserves the BUD and represents the poetic stress. A realization which remains in 3/4 would either fail to represent the stresses with metrical accents or begin to artificially elongate the stressed syllables, a slowing that is not suggested by the text more than the actual shift to trochees. Accordingly, the BUD value is adjusted to two.

When we compare our BRD to Talma's setting, the first line is entirely conformant—strong stresses occur on downbeats, and the BUD values are equivalent and expected. From the second line onwards, however, the BUD values begin to vary wildly. It seems as though Talma has only given limited attention to the innate rhythms of the text here; accordingly, the stressed syllables have fallen haphazardly across the meter. With such an unexpected strategy for declamation, we might turn to the text's meaning for an answer, and we indeed find one. The atmosphere evokes a certain slowing, aging, or delay; one understands the discontinuous rhythms accompanying the “wearier end of November” as it limps along its course. This aged declamation comes to a head in the third line, when the shift to disyllables is nearly undetectable in Talma's setting. The foot “old light” is set with a BUD value of 2.83, a value not yet seen, and certainly not implied by the poem's meter. It is the words which inform this decision; here, and

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<sup>24</sup> It is possible to make an argument for higher-order stresses in this line on “**moon**” and “**path-os**.” Talma may have read them this way, as they are both set as highest pitches in the line. Another possible scansion of “old light” in line three is as a trochee; Talma may *also* have read this as such, since “light” is placed on a downbeat.

throughout the rest of the song, Talma has prioritized the text’s meaning—stumbling, unsteady, agonized rhythms—over the words themselves.

Another example, from much earlier in Talma’s life, sheds light on her rhythmic interpretation of poetry: her setting of W.H. Auden’s “Leap Before You Look,” written in 1945 (but not published until 1986).<sup>25</sup> Though Auden’s meter is more secure than some of the previously examined texts by Stevens, we will still first scan the poem’s second stanza before commencing any examination of Talma’s frantic rendition. Observe **Example 2.15**. My interpretation considers this to be in falling rhythm, with five feet per line; Auden initiates the first two lines with dactyls, and follows both with trochees. In the latter two lines, the syllables begin to evaporate: the initial dactyl in line three is missing its stress (and is treated as a pyrrhic here), and the fourth line is similarly truncated.<sup>26</sup> These alterations come as no surprise given the content of the final line: a “tendency to disappear” brings about shorter lines. I have chosen this reading of the fourth line rather than one composed of iambs due to the inorganic nature of this proposed reversal—it makes less sense for such a poem with such regular quirks in falling

\*                    \*            \*    \*            \*

Tough-minded men get mushy in their sleep

\*                    \*            \*    \*            \*

And break the by-laws any fool can keep;

\*                    \*            \*            \*

It is not the convention but the fear

\*            \*            \*            \*

That has a tendency to disappear.

**Example 2.15:** Scansion of W.H. Auden’s “Leap Before You Look,” second stanza (1940)

<sup>25</sup> This score can be located in Preston Leonard’s anthology (2017, 193–208.) As before, the poem’s full text is available online.

<sup>26</sup> It makes little difference if this pyrrhic is scanned instead as an anacrusis.

rhythm to suddenly switch; as mentioned before, a reversal of rhythms in a metrically regular poem is rather uncommon. Additionally, the parallel construction of the first two lines (and similar construction with the fourth) supports the argument for a dactylic understanding. The reading in rising rhythm also loses the effect of Auden's dropped stress in the fourth line.

A hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line for this stanza can be found in **Example 2.16a**. Of note here are the five-bar phrases for lines one and two; the latter lines, with their missing fifth stress, are accordingly one measure shorter. Save for the pyrrhic in the stanza's midsection, each complete foot is represented with a BUD value of 3, and pauses in the vocal line to follow the poem's lineation have been included. **Example 2.16b** is a rendering of Talma's version of this stanza. Here, too, Talma has taken some liberties with the placement of the stresses and pace at which each foot is declaimed; as we will soon discover, the common thread is a disagreement in scansion and stress location.<sup>27</sup> I do not mean to position my own view of the stanza as superior or more accurate than Talma's interpretation, I only wish to examine the differences which highlight the composer's style.

Our analysis will begin with an overview of the surface-level distortions: BUD value and stress placement. In the stanza's first line, the BUD value is quickly disrupted by Talma's elongation of the word "mushy," stretching it to four quarter notes and offsetting the stress on "in." Evidently, Talma has chosen to upset the pattern here and reads "in their" as a pickup (or lower-order stress, perhaps) to "sleep." "Sleep," too, is elongated to a duration of three bars. Talma's setting of the second line displays another example of a disagreement in reading; her interpretation places a stress on "break," not the initiating "and" (understood here as a pickup),

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<sup>27</sup> In Chapter 1, I endorse a view of scansion which prioritizes natural speech. I believe in verse like this one, especially as the breakdown of form and metrical regularity has already begun, it is possible for multiple "natural" interpretations to arise, depending on which word the speaker themselves would like to emphasize.

Tough - mind - ed men get mush - y in their sleep/ And break the

by - laws a - ny fool can keep;/ It is not the con - ven - tion

but the fear/ That has a ten - den - cy to dis - ap - pear.//

\* \* \* \* \*

Tough - mind - ed men get mush - y in their sleep/

[2] And break the by - laws a - ny fool can keep:/

[1] It is not the con - ven - tion but the fear/

[1] That has a ten - den - cy to dis - ap - pear://

resulting in another foot lasting an extra quarter note. “Any fool can” is declaimed in a rapid-fire manner, abruptly shortening the length of each foot, and is perhaps more in the manner of colloquial speech than the BRD itself. Talma, like the poem’s narrator, tries to *convince* us to take the leap as if speaking directly through the music.<sup>28</sup>

The latter half of the stanza contains further distortions. The beginning of line three is the most conformant so far, but Talma inserts a rest mid-line before “but the.” Like in the first line, it is clear she understands those two words as pickups to the line’s concluding stress. However, this line elides into the stanza’s final line, omitting an expected rest and placing the stressed “that” on a weak beat, mirroring the second line’s beginning. The departure from regularity persists: the BUD lengths of this line are uniformly the highest of any line thus far, and generally obvious stresses are placed in metrically weak positions. This is, like the above, a direct result of the text: the “tendency to disappear” comes in the form of metrically dissonant duple groups (in lieu of triples) beginning on the word “tendency.” (This textual impetus is also a strong candidate for the demystification of the previous elision.) The text here is declaimed as if it is in disyllables, not the trisyllables our scansion revealed.<sup>29</sup>

We may also uncover some of the text’s effects on phrase rhythm in this stanza. As stated above, the BRD is made up of mostly five-bar phrases. In Talma’s setting, with rests and melismatic elongation, each of the first two lines is comprised of approximately eight measures of music. Her third line is approximately six or seven bars, depending on how the anacrusis and the ending of the word “fear” is understood. The inserted rest in the line’s midsection could have also been avoided by extending the word “convention” as is done to “mushy” in the first line, but

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<sup>28</sup> This song is dedicated to the soprano Geraldine Marwick, a collaborator of Talma’s whom she had reportedly been romantically interested in; Preston Leonard interprets the selection of this text, and its dedication, to make Talma’s intentions quite clear: a public declaration of love (2017, 146–47).

<sup>29</sup> The piano accompaniment (not pictured) continues on in its triple meter pattern.

I find no clear explanation for this ambiguous moment. More conclusive is the fourth line's brevity: the effect of the aforementioned disappearance results in a truncated five-bar phrase.

## 2.5 Further Applications and Conclusion

With the suggestions above for adapting the BRD to more loosely regular texts (and the English language as a whole), a greater variety of repertoire can be analyzed. Inquiries into American composers from the twentieth century and onwards like Price, Ives, Beach, Barber, Bonds, Argento, Gideon, and Larsen (to draw merely a few from a splendidly long tradition of song composition in America) may discover new, intriguing features of their music. Modern poets writing in English whose work, like Stevens, makes some use of metric regularity may be suitable candidates as well: W.H. Auden is already examined in this study, and others, like Eliot, Moore, Whitman, and Yeats come to mind. To this point, further research adopting the BRD could be conducted to analyze vocal music in other genres, namely opera. For instance, portions of Montagu Slater's libretto for *Peter Grimes* are explicitly written in verse. There are a number of complications which come with the analysis of libretti: excessively repeated text, too little text, lack of clear verse or regularity in the libretto, etc., but the possibility ought not to be disregarded.<sup>30</sup>

The BRD, as it stands, is not particularly well equipped to handle a meter which shifts in the middle of the line or stanza. This, primarily, is a result of a well-formed BRD's desire not to change its own time signature. One of the examples in this survey does this (Example 2.14a); I do not consider this terribly radical, as the alternatives fail to render an accurate rhythm of

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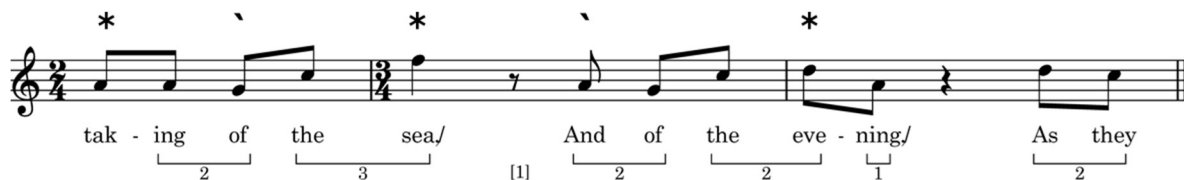
<sup>30</sup> Some of these hurdles may actually prove to be interesting avenues of inquiry, i.e., "How is the text declaimed differently in this composer's (or style period's) *da capo* sections?"

declamation, and it feels most natural for the poem. However, in the BRD of Talma’s song “Infanta Marina,” both of the instances (Examples 2.8a and 2.13a) where a lower-order stress receives a stronger metrical accent than a corresponding higher-order stress is solved with the insertion of a temporary meter change. Observe **Example 2.17a and 2.17b**; with the meters temporarily adjusted in these hypothetical renderings, the lower-order stresses are properly positioned on weaker beats.

It naturally follows that a methodological framework with a more robust apparatus for handling higher order stress would further expand this topic’s boundaries. Adapting a system from the field of linguistics, like that of Paul Kiparsky’s, may prove valuable in this field (1975, 576–616). A further extension of this might be a system not so beholden to the metrical foot itself, but rather stress and groupings surrounding stressed syllables (à la Gerard Manley Hopkins’s sprung rhythm), could be applied to works which set text by so-called “free verse” poets like Cummings, H.D., Williams, and countless others. Such a change would allow for



**Example 2.17a:** Hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line of stanza two of “Infanta Marina,” with meter changed to 3/4



**Example 2.17b:** Hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line of stanza four of “Infanta Marina,” with meter changed to 3/4

better management of lines whose scansion is tenuous. But this may make such a framework like the BRD unnecessary or be so far removed from the original approach that it becomes something else entirely.

Since pop music was briefly examined in the first chapter, I feel it would be prudent to address the potential implications of examining this style of music with the BRD. I am hesitant to suggest it will reveal particularly fascinating details about the music, because it does not share a key characteristic of the other works examined in this study: pop lyrics are, generally, not in the same manner as poems. While certain songs may be better suited for this than others, the BRD focuses on the examination of feet and regularly constructed lines (and the deformations of such things.) Art songs most often draw their texts from poems as complete works of art which possess integrity on their own merit, but I would not say the same about lyrics: they are *intended* to be sung or rapped, and incomplete without the accompanying music. To me, this is a fundamental difference. Eron (2024) has already published a thorough study defining the ways that the prosodic elements of a song interact with the musical, specifically when the listener perceives misalignment, in such a manner not terribly different from the BRD.

In addition to the further research possibilities discussed above, the BRD may also be applied to a number of pedagogical settings. An instructor in the theory classroom could apply the BRD with little adjustment; upon looking at a finished hypothetical BRD-conformant vocal line and comparing it to a composer's original, the differences become apparent, and discussion and interpretation may begin from there. This would be appropriate in either the study of any song in English or with German Lieder. Budding composers aspiring to write vocal music would also benefit from pre-compositional exercises, such as writing out the text in a manner strictly adherent to the poetic beat (like the BRD), then examining where this mold can be broken (or

discarded outright) according to the needs of the text. A singer familiar with the possibilities of the BRD could derive further understanding about their repertoire (when appropriate) and the declamatory strategy of the composer at hand, thus informing their performance. A voice teacher may instruct their students' interpretations using the same method.

There is, of course, more to be said about Talma's songs; as stated in Chapter 1, she composed around forty art songs during her career (the majority of which are extant), and she completed numerous other works for choir, works for two or three voices and piano, two operas, and works for ensemble and vocal soloist. The scope of this survey has only examined the music of four songs and focused primarily on singular aspects of their construction. Much of her music throughout her career deserves its due examination, whether from this angle or another.<sup>31</sup>

We might now understand Talma's exploitation of the intersection between words and rhythm as a core element of her songwriting process. Across different texts and style periods, it is clear that Talma's declamatory strategies have a unifying characteristic: when appropriate, the rhythms of the poem need not be strictly represented in the music. At times, the designs of her favored poets were discarded in favor of a more expressive, characteristic declamation, one which catapults the listener toward the real character of the text.

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<sup>31</sup> Talma's music is understood to fall into three categories: Neoclassical (1925–1952), Serial, (1952–mid-1960), and non-serial atonal, which lasted until her death. Preston Leonard demonstrates these periods are not as distinct as they may seem, citing shared characteristics through Talma's life and her inconstant relationship with twelve-tone materials into the third period (2014, 28). For example, the segment of "Lunar Paraphrase" (a third-period song) which we investigated above makes frequent use of vocal melodies containing eleven different pitches, which *mostly* do not repeat. A full chromatic gamut is used in the song's piano introduction (not pictured).

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# Appendix

## Infanta Marina

No. 1 from *Infanta Marina* (1988)

Wallace Stevens

Louise Talma

**Languidly**  $\text{♩} = 52$   
***p***

Voice

Her terr - ace was the sand and the palms and the twi - light She

Piano

***p***

6

made of the mo - tions of her wrist the gran - - - di - ose ges - tures of her thought

13

— The rump - ling of the plumes of this crea - ture of the eve - ning came to be

***tr***

***3***

18

sleights of sails o - ver the sea. And thus she roamed in the

24

roam - ings of her fan Par - tak - ing of the sea, And of the eve - ning As they

28

flowed a - round And ut - tered their sub - sid - - - ing sound.

poco rit. a tempo rit.....

ppp