Shakespearean Rhythm

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare uses many different forms of rhythm and prose. Here are some important terms you will need to know:

**Meter:** A recurring rhythm of accented (stressed) and unaccented syllables. A metrical unit of one accent and one or more unaccented syllables is called a foot

**Tetrameter:** A line of verse consisting of four metrical feet.

**Pentameter**: A line of verse consisting of five metrical feet.

**Prose:** the ordinary form of spoken and written language whose unit is the sentence, rather than the line as it is in poetry

Here is an example of rhythm in Act II, scene i of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream:*

The *King* doth *keep* his *re-*vels *here* to-*night.*

Take *heed* the *Queen* come *not* with*-in* his *sight*

For *O-*be-*ron* is *pass*-ing *fell* and *wrath*

Be-*cause* that *she*, as *her* at-*tend-*and, *hat*

A *love*-ly *boy* *stole*-en *from* an *In-*dian *king;*

She *nev-*er *had* so *sweet* a *chang-*ge-*ling.*

And *jeal*-ous *O-*be-*ron* would *have* the *child*

Knight *of* his *train,* to *trace* the *for-*ests *wild.*

But *she* per-*force* with-*holds* the *lov-*ed *boy,*

Crowns *him* with *flow-*ers, and *makes* him *all* her *joy.*

And *now* they *nev-*er *meet* in *grove* or *green,*

By *foun*-tain *clear,* or *span-*gled *star*-light *sheen,*

But *they* do *square*, that *all* their *elves* for *fear*

Creep *in*-to *a*-corn *cups* and *hid* them *there.*

*(II.i.18-32)*

Count the number of syllables in each line. Does each line have the same number?

Does it have a rhythm? Can you figure out what it is?