

## Blank Verse in Shakespeare's *Othello*

### Blank Verse

Shakespeare's essential pattern in his plays is BLANK VERSE (unrhymed iambic pentameter). Therefore, whenever a reader notices a change in this pattern (a change in rhythm from iambic to trochaic, a shift in meter from pentameter to tetrameter, or a shift from poetry to prose) there is a reason for the change. With the change, Shakespeare is creating a mood, establishing character ...something. Consider the context of the passages below and discuss how structure and form affect meaning.

#### from Act I, scene iii:

*DUKE OF VENICE*

Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence,  
Which, as a grise or step, may help these lovers  
Into your favour.  
When remedies are past, the griefs are ended  
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.  
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone  
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.  
What cannot be preserved when fortune takes  
Patience her injury a mockery makes.  
The robb'd that smiles steals something from the thief;  
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

*BRABANTIO*

So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile;  
We lose it not, so long as we can smile.  
He bears the sentence well that nothing bears  
But the free comfort which from thence he hears,  
But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow  
That, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow.  
These sentences, to sugar, or to gall,  
Being strong on both sides, are equivocal:  
But words are words; I never yet did hear  
That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear.  
I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of state.

*DUKE OF VENICE*

The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes  
for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best  
known to you; and though we have there a substitute  
of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign  
mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you.  
you must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of  
your new fortunes with this more stubborn and  
boisterous expedition.

#### also from Act I, scene iii:

*IAGO*

It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of  
the will. Come, be a man. Drown thyself! drown  
cats and blind puppies. I have professed me thy  
friend and I confess me knit to thy deserving with  
cables of perdurable toughness; I could never  
better stead thee than now. Put money in thy  
purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy favour with  
an usurped beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It  
cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her  
love to the Moor, -- put money in thy purse, -- nor he  
his to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou  
shalt see an answerable sequestration: -- put but  
money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in  
their wills: fill thy purse with money: -- the food  
that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be  
to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must  
change for youth: when she is sated with his body,  
she will find the error of her choice: she must  
have change, she must: therefore put money in thy  
purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a  
more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money  
thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt  
an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian not  
too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou  
shalt enjoy her; therefore make money. A pox of  
drowning thyself! it is clean out of the way: seek  
thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than  
to be drowned and go without her.