

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 guise 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.