

SHAKESPEARE'S VERSE

2017

notes taken from various sources

GENERAL

Shakespeare's plays are written predominantly in "blank verse,"

- a poetic form preferred by English dramatists in the 16th and early 17th centuries.
 - It is a very flexible medium
 - The first blank verse play was *Gorboduc*, a tragic drama dating from 1561, and *Supposes*, a comedy, was written in prose.
 - By the time Shakespeare came along, writers like Marlowe had made blank verse plays the norm, though rhyme was certainly not dead. Poet Samuel Daniel said rhyme "gives the poet wings".
 - like the human speech pattern, blank verse is capable of a wide range of tones and inflections
 - The lines, which are usually unrhymed, are divided into five "feet," each of which is a two-syllable unit known as an "iamb."
 - Each iamb is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Blank verse is technically defined as unrhymed iambic pentameter.
 - Rhythm helps to create and sustain pace and may have assisted the actors in remembering their lines and identifying which words hold importance in their lines

VERSE IN MACBETH

Macbeth was written comparatively late in Shakespeare's career

- He had, by this time, abandoned the more formal verse of earlier plays, like *Richard II*
 - His writing style had evolved into a more mature one, which is less structured and more expressive
 - In fact, by the time Macbeth was written in 1606, he was using rhyming couplets very infrequently - usually to mark the end a scene

RHYMING COUPLETS IN MACBETH

(2.1.61 - 62)

MACBETH: Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives.
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

(2.1.64 - 65)

MACBETH: Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

(2.4.43 - 44)

OLD MAN: God's benison go with you and with those
That would make good of bad and friends of foes.

(4.3.246 - 247)

MALCOLM: Put on their instruments. Receive what cheer
you may.
The night is long that never finds the day.

CHARACTERS IN MACBETH

Shakespeare aimed to create characters which come alive so completely that we, the audience, can get to know them almost as if they are real people

- He achieves this by mirroring so many of life's complexities through themes, language, action, soliloquies, structure and a plethora of other techniques