

Language in Shakespeare's Plays

Soliloquy is the term used when a character is speaking to himself without the awareness of others. Used to reveal the character's innermost thoughts.

Monologue is the term used when a character is speaking to others but he/she is monopolizing dialogue. Used to reveal the character's thoughts to an audience.

Blank Verse refers to un-rhymed **iambic pentameter**, ten syllables alternating unstressed and stressed syllables (da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM).

- **Function:** Blank verse is employed because it comes close to natural speech but raises it above the ordinary without sounding artificial. Blank Verse is used for momentous occasions, and for introspective or passionate moments.
- **Example:** *Othello*: Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well; (*Othello*, V.ii.343)

Rhymed Verse in Shakespeare's plays is evident in two main ways. A **Sonnet** is a poem of usually 14 lines that has a particular rhyming scheme (ABABCDDEFEGG). A rhyming **couplet** is a pair of lines that rhyme at the end (AA).

- **Function:** Rhyme is often used for ritualistic or choral effects and for passages that give advice or point to a moral, or in Prologues, Epilogues and Choruses, where it distinguishes the imaginary from the "real." The **couplet**, specifically, is also used at the end of a scene or speech to indicate that the scene/speech is over.
- **Examples:**
 - *Romeo*: O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in Ethiop's ear:
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hands.
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night. (I.iv.43-52)
 - *Juliet*: Of one I danc'd withal (note that Juliet uses 6 of the 10 syllables for iambic pentameter)
Nurse: Anon, **anon!** (note the nurse finishes Juliet's iambic pentameter with 4 syllables)
Come, let's away; the strangers are all **gone**. (this line is a full iambic pentameter that completes the couplet)

Prose refers to ordinary speech with no rhythmical patterns to it. Prose is typically printed like an ordinary paragraph, with standard rules of capitalization: only proper nouns, the pronoun "I" and the first letter of a new sentence are capitalized.

Information Compiled by D. Munther from:

- <http://www.mrgeesothellofellows.com/writers-resources.php>
- http://moodleshare.org/pluginfile.php/4557/mod_page/content/1/Romeo%20and%20Juliet/Shakespeares%20iambic%20Pentameter.pdf

- **Function:** Prose is the language of everyday conversation. In Shakespeare's day, Prose was considered "low brow"—it was usually spoken in Shakespeare's plays by servants and lower classes. As an innovator, Shakespeare consciously infused his plays with prose passages so graceful and thought-provoking that they equaled, and sometimes even surpassed, the majesty of verse or poetry passages.
- **Example:** *Servant I:* Where's Potpan, that he helps not to take away? He shift a trencher! He scrape a trencher! (1.5.1-2)

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