

B.A. II Semester (Poetry)

Notes

Unit – 2: Stanza Forms

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1. Heroic Couplet

Definition:

A **heroic couplet** consists of **two consecutive lines of rhymed iambic pentameter**. It was widely used in **epic and narrative poetry** during the **Neoclassical period**, particularly by poets like **Alexander Pope** and **John Dryden**.

Characteristics:

- **Two lines of iambic pentameter** (each line has 10 syllables, alternating unstressed and stressed syllables).
- **End rhyme** (AA, BB, CC pattern).
- Expresses a complete thought in two lines.
- Often used for **satirical, philosophical, and epic poetry**.

Famous Examples:

1. **Alexander Pope (from *An Essay on Criticism*)**
*"A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."*
2. **Geoffrey Chaucer (from *The Canterbury Tales*)**
*"Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote."*

Usage:

- Frequently found in **epic poetry, essays, and satirical works**.
- Pope's "**The Rape of the Lock**" and Dryden's "**Absalom and Achitophel**" are famous for their **heroic couplets**.

2. Blank Verse

Definition:

Blank verse is **unrhymed iambic pentameter**, making it one of the most common verse forms in English poetry, especially in **dramatic and narrative poetry**. It allows for **natural speech rhythms** while maintaining a poetic structure.

Characteristics:

- **Unrhymed iambic pentameter** (each line has 10 syllables: unstressed-stressed pattern).
- **No rhyme scheme**, but maintains a rhythmic flow.
- Used in **epic poetry, drama, and reflective poetry**.
- Frequently associated with **Shakespearean drama**.

Famous Examples:

1. **William Shakespeare (from *Hamlet*)**
*"To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."*
2. **John Milton (from *Paradise Lost*)**
*"Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe."*

Usage:

- **Shakespeare** used blank verse extensively in his **plays and sonnets**.
- **Milton's "Paradise Lost"** is one of the greatest examples of blank verse in epic poetry.
- **Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Robert Frost** also used blank verse in their poetry.

3. Spenserian Stanza

Definition:

The Spenserian stanza is a **nine-line stanza** created by **Edmund Spenser** for his epic poem "**The Faerie Queene**". It combines **eight lines of iambic pentameter** with a final **iambic hexameter** (known as an **Alexandrine**).

Structure:

- **Rhyme scheme: ABABBCBCC.**
- The first **eight lines are in iambic pentameter.**
- The **ninth line is an Alexandrine** (12 syllables, iambic hexameter)

Famous Examples:

1. **Edmund Spenser (from *The Faerie Queene*)**

*"A gentle knight was pricking on the plain,
Yclad in mighty arms and silver shield,
Wherein old dints of deep wounds did remain,
The cruel marks of many a bloody field;
Yet arms till that time did he never wield:
His angry steed did chide his foaming bit,
As much disdainng to the curb to yield:
Full jolly knight he seem'd, and fair did sit,
As one for knightly jousts and fierce encounters fit."*

2. **John Keats (from *The Eve of St. Agnes*)**

*"Ah, bitter chill it was! The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith."*

Usage:

- Spenserian stanza is most famous for "**The Faerie Queene**", an **allegorical epic**.
- **Romantic poets** like **Keats and Shelley** adopted this stanza form.
- **Lord Byron** used it in "**Childe Harold's Pilgrimage**".

Summary of Stanza Forms

Stanza Form	Structure	Rhyme Scheme	Famous Poets & Works
Heroic Couplet	Two lines of iambic pentameter	AA, BB, CC	Pope (<i>Essay on Criticism</i>), Chaucer (<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>)
Blank Verse	Unrhymed iambic pentameter	No rhyme	Shakespeare (<i>Hamlet</i>), Milton (<i>Paradise Lost</i>)
Spenserian Stanza	9 lines (8 in iambic pentameter, 1 in iambic hexameter)	ABABBCBCC	Spenser (<i>The Faerie Queene</i>), Keats (<i>The Eve of St. Agnes</i>)

These stanza forms played a **significant role in English poetry**, shaping **epic, narrative, and dramatic verse**.