STANZA FORMS IN POETRY
1. Heroic Couplets

Heroic couplet is a couplet of rhyming iambic pentameters often forming a distinct rhetorical as well as metrical unit. The origin of the form in English poetry is unknown, but **Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century** was the first to make extensive use of it. The heroic couplet became the principal metre used in drama about the mid-17th century, and the form was perfected by **John Dryden and Alexander Pope** in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The Heroic Couplet consists of **two Iambic Pentameter lines rhyming together**. It is called 'Heroic' because Iambic Pentameter verse rhymed or unrhymed, was first used for **epic or heroic poetry**. It is an important measure as far as English poetry is concerned. Most of the poetry of the **Augustan Age (the age of Dryden and Pope 1660 – 1750)** is cast in this measure.

The chief characteristics of the heroic couplet are well-illustrated by the following one:

> Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,
> And half the platform, just reflects the other.

Each line of the couplet has five feet and the second syllable in each foot is accented. The position of pause is indicated by the comma. The last syllable of 'brother' rhymes with the last syllable of 'other'.

The heroic couplet may be of **two kinds – closed or run on.** In the closed couplet the sense is competed with each couplet and each thus forms a complete sentence, a unit in itself. The couplet cited above is of a closed variety. In the run-on variety, the sense runs on from one couplet to another till it is completed. In this case, the individual couplet does not form a unit, but the unit is formed by a group of couplets which complete the sense, and this larger unit is called the verse-paragraph.

The Heroic Couplet was first used in England by **Chaucer** who might have learned it from French sources. He used this measure for many of the stories in the *Canterbury Tales.* **Spenser** used it with great skill for his *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, **Marlowe** too used it with great success for his *Hero and Leander.*

Heroic Couplets

- A heroic couplet is a pair of rhyming lines that express a memorable thought.
- Many of the couplets express a complete thought in a complete sentence, thus making the couplet **closed**.

"Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*

Couplet

A **couplet** is a pair of lines of metre in poetry. **Couplets** usually comprise two lines that rhyme and have the same metre. A **couplet** may be formal (closed) or run-on (open). In a formal (or closed) **couplet**, each of the two lines is end-stopped, implying that there is a grammatical pause at the end of a line of verse.

Heroic Couplet

- The name "heroic couplet" was partly adopted because they were used in poems to describe heroic events
  - ie. deeds of high accomplishment and matters of high admiration
- largely known for being self contained and end-stopped, as opposed to enjambed couplets

2. TERZA RIMA (3 lines)

The terza rima is a poem, **Italian in** origin, composed of tercets woven into a complex rhyme scheme.

Rules of the Terza Rima Form : The end-word of the second line in one tercet supplies the rhyme for the first and third lines in the following tercet. Thus, the rhyme scheme (aba, bcb, cdc, ded) continues through to the final stanza or line.

Terza rima is typically written in an iambic line, and in English, most often in iambic pentameter. If another line length is chosen, such as tetrameter, the lines should be of the same length.

Example from Shelley's Ode to the West Wind

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,   A
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves **dead**   B
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,   A

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic **red**, B
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O **thou**,   C
Who chariotest to their dark wintry **bed** B

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and **low,**   C
Each like a corpse within its grave, **until**   D
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall **blow**   C

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and **fil**l D
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)   E
With living hues and odours plain and **hill:** D

History of the Terza Rima Form : The terza rima was invented by the **Italian poet Dante** Alighieri in the late 13th century to structure his three-part epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Dante chose to end each canto of *The Divine Comedy* with a single line that completes the rhyme scheme with the end-word of the second line of the preceding tercet.

Terza rima

Terza rima is a rhyming verse stanza form that consists of an interlocking three-line rhyme scheme. It was first used by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri.

Sample Terza Rima Poem
"Ode to the West Wind" by P. Shelley

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

3. The Chaucerian Stanza / Rhyme Royal / Rime Royale (7 lines)

The Chaucerian stanza is so-called because it was first used in England **by Chaucer**, "the father of English poetry." Most probably he borrowed it **from France**. It is also called Rhyme Royal because it was used by King James I of Scotland in the 15th century for his well-known poem *King's Quair.*

The Chaucerian Stanza is a stanza of seven Iambic Pentameter lines. In this stanza the first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fourth and fifth, and the last two lines rhyme together, thus forming a couplet. The rhyme-scheme is a a b, a b b, c c. The stanza is particularly suited for narrative verse, and Chaucer used it for several stories in The Canterbury Tales. **Shakespeare used it for his *The Rape of Lucrece***, and in the Victorian Age it was used by **William Morris** for his *The Earthly Paradise.*

Here is an example of the Chaucerian Stanza:

Then, childish fear, avaunt! debating, die!   A
Respect and reason, wait on wrinkled age! B
My heart shall never countermand mine eye; A
Sad pause and deep regard beseem the stage; B
My part is youth, and beats these from the stage; B
Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize; C
Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies? C

RHYME ROYAL

- **rhyme royal**- a seven-line stanza of iambic pentameter rhymed *ababbcc*, used by Chaucer and other medieval poets.

4. The Ottava Rima (Rhyma) (8 Lines)

This stanza-form was first used in England in the early **16th century by Sir Thomas Wyatt from Italy** He introduced this stanza – form into England. Like the Chaucerian Stanza it is also well suited for narrative purpose. It has also been used for satiric purposes. Shelley used it for his The Witch of Atlas, Keats for his The Pot of Basil, and Byron for his Don Juan.

Ottava Rhyma is a stanza **of eight Iambic Pentameter lines**. The first line rhymes with the third and fifth, the second with the fourth and sixth, and the last two lines rhyme together, and thus form a couplet. In other words the stanza consists of six lines rhyming alternately with a couplet at the end. The rhyme scheme of the stanza is **a b, a b, a b, c c.**

Here is an example of Ottava Rhyma **from Byron's *Don Juan*:**

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Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,          A
'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range B
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;   A
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange      B
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,         A
And few there are whom these cannot estrange;   B
Men have, all these resources, we but one,  C
To love again, and be again undone.         C
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5. Spensarian Stanza (8 +1)

The stanza is so-called because it was first used by the poet **Spenser** for his romantic epic, **"The Fairy Queen".** It is a stanza consisting of eight Iambic Pentameter lines and an **Alexandrine** or a line of twelve syllables at the end.

The first line rhymes with the third; the second, fourth, fifth and seventh lines rhyme together, and the sixth line rhymes with the eighth one and the ninth. The rhyme scheme is **a b a b, b c b c, c.**

It is a very difficult stanza to handle, for in it one rhyme is repeated four times, and another three times. This naturally puts a severe strain on the skill and resources of a poet. He must have full command over language, to find so many words with similar end sounds. Even then the stanza is admirably suited for long narrative and descriptive poems. Spenser used it with great success for his Fairy Queen, and ever since poets have frequently used it with more or less success.

In the early 18th century, it was used by **Byron** for his *Child Harold*, by **Keats** for *The Eve of St. Agnes*, **Shelley** for *The Revolt of Islam* and *Adonais,* and by **Tennyson** for *The Lotos-Eaters.*

Here is an example of the Spensarian Stanza **from Shelley's** *Adonais***:**

Ah woe is me? Winter is come and gone,   A
But grief returns with the revolving year.   B
The arts and streams renew their joyous tone; A
The ants, the bees, the swallows, reappear;   B
Fresh leaves and flowers deck the dead Season's bier B
The amorous birds now pair in every brake, C
And build their mossy homes in field and brere;   B   (10 syllable)
And the green lizard and the golden snake, C
Like un imprisoned flames, out of their trance awake,   C   Alexandrine (12 syllables)

1. --   (couplet) 2
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2. --

   --   (tercet) 3

3. --

    --   (quatrain) 4

5. ---------------------------------------

    ---------------------------------------   (Sestet) 6

6. ---------------------------------------

    ---------------------------------------   (Chaucerian Stanza) 7