
The main VERSE / STANZA FORMS in English poetry¹

- **STICHIC** verse – continuous run of lines of same length and metre, not broken into stanzas, used in narrative poetry (most blank verse is stichic)
- **COUPLET**
 - 2 rhymed lines after each other
 - >> **HEROIC COUPLET** – in 17 and 18 c. – rhyming iambic pentameter
 - >> **OCTOSYLLABIC** couplet aka short couplet
- **TERZA RIMA**
 - variant of **tercet** used by Dante in *The DC*
 - chain rhyme **aba bcb cdc ded e / ded ee**
- **QUATRAIN**
 - 4-line stanza
 - among the most popular in English verse; various rhyme patterns:
 - >> **HEROIC quatrain** – iambic pentameter, rhymed **abab** (aka **ELEGIAIC stanza**)
 - >> **MEMORIAM stanza** – rhymed **abba** (after A. Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*)
 - >> **BALLAD STANZA**
 - alternating lines of iambic tetrameter / iambic trimeter
 - rhyme scheme usually **abcb** or **abab**
 - (e.g. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*)
 - >> **COMMON STANZA / or FOUR-LINE STANZA**
 - same characteristics as ballad stanza, used in **hymnody**
 - (e.g. E. Dickinson)
 - **RHYME ROYAL**
 - 7-line stanza in iambic pentameter
 - rhyming **ababbcc**
 - named after King James I of Scotland, but first used by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* (aka **CHAUCERIAN stanza**; adapted from French and Italian models) (modern e.g. Auden, 'Letter to Lord Byron', Yeats, 'The Bronze Head')
 - **OTTAVA RIMA**
 - 8-line stanza in iambic pentameter, usually decasyllabic or hendecasyllabic lines
 - from Italian, e.g. Boccaccio, in English first used by Chaucer
 - rhyme scheme **abababcc**
 - (Byron's favourite verse scheme, other e.g. Yeats, 'The Circus Animals Desertion')
 - **SPENSERIAN STANZA**
 - made famous by E. Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*
 - 9 lines, **ababbcbcc**
 - iambic pentameter but the last line alexandrine (iambic hexameter) which used to break the monotony and make a point

¹ This handout is based on Mario Klarer, *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

- **ENGLISH ODE**
 - mostly **10 to 11 lines**, mostly iambic
 - most common rhyme scheme **ababcdecde**
 - but many variants in terms of rhyme scheme and metre (E. Spenser, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth)
 - **SONNET**
 - mostly **14 lines**, iambic pentameter (invented in Italy in 13th c., in Engl. popular from 16th century)
 - some later variations, 10 to 16 lines (e.g. Hopkins)
 - >> **ITALIAN – PETRARCHAN SONNET**
 - hendecasyllabic
 - octave **abbaabba** and sestet **cdecde** (or **cdccdc** etc.) (e.g. Milton)
 - >> **ENGLISH – SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET** (first used by Surrey)
 - 3 quatrains and 1 couplet **abab cdcd efef gg**
 - >> **SPENSERIAN SONNET**
 - important variant – a hybrid between Petrarchan and English pattern
 - quatrains of interlinked rhyme **abab bcbc cdcd ee** (e.g. Spenser *Amoretti*, Sonnet 10)
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- **VILLANELLE**
 - intricate in terms of metre and rhyme
 - Five **tercets aba**, one final **quatrain abaa**.
 - It combines rhyme with the technique of **REFRAIN** – 1st and 3rd line of stanza 1 are repeated throughout - 1st line as the last in st. 2 and 4, 3rd line as last line in st. 3 and 5. St. 6 repeats 1st and 3rd line from st. 1 in the last two lines.
 - **SESTINA**
 - 6 x **6-line stanzas** (and a 3-line envoy/i at the end)
 - also based on **repetition**, but of **words**, not entire lines, according to a set pattern (e.g. E. Spenser, Ph. Sidney, E. Bishop)
 - **LIMERICK**
 - used for nonsense verse
 - **aabba**
 - **5 lines** (2 lines in trimeter, 2 in dimeter, 1 in trimeter; often includes pyrrhic feet)
 - often starts with 'There was', the first and 5th line should end with the same word (e.g. Edward Lear)
 - **COMBINED STANZAS, COMPOSITE FORMS**