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**LMD THREE: 2020- 2021 G: 2**

**Lecture Three: Stanza Forms**

**Stanza Defined**

Stanzas are a series of verses grouped and isolated by a blank space to give the poem an organization they are similar to the paragraph in a piece of prose. To recognize a stanza, one should check the number of lines.

**Types of Stanza**

There are several stanza forms accessible to poets composing English poetry. The most used ones are provided below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of lines | Type of stanza |
| Two lines | Couplet |
| Three lines | Tercet |
| Four lines | Quatrain |
| Five lines | Cinquin |
| Six lines | Sestet |
| Seven lines | Septet |
| Eight lines | Octet (octave) |

Table One: Stanza Forms of English Poetry

* **The Couplet**

The couplet is the name for two rhyming lines of verse following immediately after each other forming a stanza; it was first introduced in English poetry by Edmund Waller. The couplet can be generally termed Heroic Couplet especially, in John Dryden’s *Translation of Virgil* (1697) and Pope’s *Translation of Homer’s Iliad* (1715)*.* The famous Couplet by Alexander Pope is a reflection on good values:   
Good nature and good sense must ever join  
to err is human, to forgive, divine

* **The Tercet**

Also labeled the triplet, is a three-line stanza, introduced into English poetry by Sir Thomas Wyatt in the 16th century. It was employed by Shelley and is the form used in Byron’s *The Prophecy of Dante and Mathew Prior* *Jinny the Just*; here an excerpt from *Jinny the Just*:

Releas'd from the noise of the butcher and baker  
Who, my old friends be thanked, did seldom forsake her,  
And from the soft duns of my landlord the Quaker,  
  
From chiding the footmen and watching the lasses,  
From Nell that burn'd milk, and Tom that broke glasses  
(Sad mischiefs thro' which a good housekeeper passes!)[[1]](#footnote-1)

* **The Quatrain**

It is a four-line stanza, the first form used in popular English literature. It was perfectly used by the poet Edward Fitzgerald in his translation of *Rubaiyat Omar Khayyam*. We have two types of quatrain

1. Heroic quatrain with rhyme patterns (abab) used in Thomas Gray’s, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is a poem written in a series of quatrains. E.g.

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,

 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Memoriam stanza with rhyme patterns (abba) used in Lord Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” e.g.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Behold, we know not anything; | |  |
| I can but trust that good shall fall | |  |
| At last—far off—at last, to all, | |
| And every winter change to spring.[[3]](#footnote-3) | |  | |
|  | |  | |
|  | |  | |
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|  |

* **The Quintain**

A cinquain or quintain is a five-line stanza. Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the poets who wrote in Quintains his poem *To a Skylark e.g.*

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.[[4]](#footnote-4)

* **The Sestet and Octave**

The sestet is a six-line stanza and the octave is an eight-line stanza (8 lines). These two forms are frequent with a sonnet distributed into two parts: an octave+ a sestet as did John Keats in his famous sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,

And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;

Round many western islands have I been

Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told

That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;

Yet did I never breathe its pure serene

Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken;

Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes

He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men

Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—

Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

* **The Septet**

It is a seven-line Stanza that falls between the two components of a sonnet, the octave, and the sestet. Geoffrey Chaucer was the first to use it; this is why the septet is often called Chaucerian Stanza. Edgar Alan Poe also wrote septet poems like *Annabel Lee*

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
Of those who were older than we,  
Of many far wiser than we,  
And neither the angels in heaven above,  
Nor the demons down under the sea,  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/jinny-the-just/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44299/elegy-written-in-a-country-churchyard [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.bartleby.com/360/4/141.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45146/to-a-skylark [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44481/on-first-looking-into-chapmans-homer [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://sites.google.com/site/examplesinpoetry/septet-poetry-examples-definition [↑](#footnote-ref-6)