

Poetry
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Lecture 4
Forms of Poetry

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Forms of Poetry



- Ballad, Dream Poetry
- Sonnet, Hymn, Ode
- Epic, Mock Epic, Verse Epistle
- Elegy, Song, Lyrical Ballad, Pastoral
- Dramatic Monologue
- Blank verse
- Free verse
- Verse paragraph
- Stanza Forms



Hello! The topic of this lecture is Forms of Poetry. We have different forms of poetry right from the beginning of humankind to the present day in various languages. In English, we are familiar with different forms like this: Ballad, Dream Poetry, Sonnet, Hymn, Ode, Epic, Mock Epic, Verse Epistle, Elegy, Song, Lyrical Ballad, Pastoral, Dramatic Monologue, Blank Verse, Free Verse, Verse Paragraph, Stanza Forms. As you can see some kind of historical development you can see in various forms of poetry.

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Ballad



- **Traditional ballad:** a folk song telling a popular tragic story dramatically and objectively
- Quatrains with variations in stress and rhyme
- Dialogue form; supernatural element,

"The Demon Lover" Stanza 1

"Where have you been, my long lost lover,
This seven long years and more?"
"I've been seeking gold for thee, my love,
And riches of great store."



Let us begin with Ballad. Ballads are traditionally narrative poems. They are actually songs, actually folk songs. They tell popular stories and usually they are tragic. There is a kind of drama and no subjectivity is there. All objectively is told. These poems have 4 lines in each of the stanzas that is why they are called quatrains. Some variations will be there in stress and rhyme. Usually they appear in dialogue form with also some kind of supernatural element. One of the famous Ballads in English is ‘The Demon Lover.’ It has many versions. This version has one stanza and here we have this example,

“Where have you been, my long lost lover,
This seven long years and more?”
“I’ve been seeking gold for thee, my love,
And riches of great store.”

So, that dialogue continues between the lover and the beloved. It goes on like this at the end it ends tragically.

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Dream Poetry



- Poems about Dreams, Visions, Reveries
- Popular in the Middle Ages
- The narrator falls asleep and dreams the events of the tale
- Well-known examples
 - Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*
 - Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1816)
- Contrast between dream and reality



Next, we have Dream Poetry. This Dream poetry is all about having a dream, vision, reveries and then the narrator telling the story. This form of poetry was very popular in the Middle Ages.

The narrator falls asleep and dreams the events of this tale and then starts telling the tale. This is actually a frame for which another tale or many other tales may be told. We have some well-known examples. One is Chaucer's 'The Book of the Duchess.' Another is Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan.' In this poem we have a contrast between dream and reality.

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Sonnet



- Introduced into England by **Wyatt** and **Surrey**
- **The Italian or Petrarchan kind**
 - Octave (8 lines) and sestet (6 lines)
 - ABBA ABBA CDE CDC or CDC DCD
 - Transition indicated by a volta (turn of thought)
 - Good practitioners: Milton, Wordsworth
- **The English or Shakespearean sonnet**
 - Three quatrains (3x4 lines) & a couplet (2 lines)
 - ABAB CDCD EFEF GG
 - Without any volta



The next form we deal with is Sonnet. It is a very famous poetic form. It was introduced in England by Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey. We have two kinds of sonnets: One is called the Italian or Petrarchan Sonnet. This Petrarchan Sonnet has 2 divisions. One is called Octave with 8 lines. Another is called Sestet with 6 lines. The rhyme scheme goes like this: ABBA ABBA CDE or CDC DCD and it may have many other variations.

There is a transition from the octave to the sestet and it is indicated by what is known as volta. It means a change of thought or a turn of thought and we have a number of good practitioners of this form, two of them are Milton and Wordsworth. We have another kind of sonnet that is called the English or Shakespearean sonnet. This particular form has 3 quatrains that means 4 lines each and a couplet at the end that is 2 lines. So, the rhyme scheme goes like this, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG and here there is no volta. The whole idea is developed till the end finally the summary is given.

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Ode



- An elaborate and elevated lyric poem
- A long ceremonious address to a person or a thing or an abstract idea
- Serious in subject, language, and tone
- **Pindaric ode:** Public praise and three part-structure
- Perfect ode:
Thomas Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" (1757)
- Irregular ode:
William Collins's "Ode to Evening" (1746)
- **Horatian ode:** Private reflection, and free structure
Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820)



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Now, let us deal with the form Ode. An ode is an elaborate and elevated lyric poem. It is a long ceremonious address to a person or a thing or an abstract idea. It is serious in subject, language, and tone. Here we have 2 kinds of odes. One is called Pindaric Ode, based on this Pindar writer, poet. Another is called Horatian Ode, derived from Horace, another writer, poet. The Pindaric ode is a public praise and it has a 3-part structure and again within this Pindaric Ode we have 2 forms: Perfect Ode and Irregular Ode. For the perfect Pindaric Ode, we have the example of Thomas Gray's 'The Progress of Poesy' and for the Irregular Ode we have the example in William Collins's 'Ode to Evening.' The Horatian Ode is all about private reflection, meditation, thought and it has a free structure. A good example we have in English literature is Keat's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.'

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Epic



- A long narrative poem about the great deeds of a legendary hero in a grand style
 - Gods' relation and support to the hero
 - Superhuman adventures in battles or voyages
 - Saving or establishing a nation.
- **Primary or oral epics:**
The Iliad; Beowulf; Gilgamesh
- **Secondary or literary epics:**
Virgil's *Aeneid*
Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667/1674)



Now we come to the Epic form. It is a long narrative poem about the great deeds of a legendary hero in a grand style. It deals with Gods and Goddesses, Heroes. Gods may support some and may oppose some others. All kinds of superhuman adventures, in battles and voyages we have in epics. It ultimately deals with something to do with saving or protecting or establishing a nation.

We have 2 kinds of epic. One is called Primary or Oral Epics. In this group we have well known epics like The Iliad, Beowulf, Gilgamesh and in the second kind we have Literary Epics. Well known examples include Virgil's 'Aeneid' and Milton's 'Paradise Lost.'

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Mock Epic



- An imitation of the epic for a satirical purpose
- Application of lofty style and conventions to trivial or petty subjects
- Ridicule of epic conventions too
 - Books and cantos, invocation, battles, supernatural machinery, epic simile, epithets
- **Mock heroic poem**, a variation of the mock epic
- Not long enough and not divided into books and cantos

Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1682)



Then we come to another form Mock Epic. We have Epic and Mock Epic. You can understand, it is a mocking of the Epic. It is a ridiculing of the epic. It uses the Epic form but for a different reason, for satirical purpose. So, it is an imitation of the epic form for a satirical purpose. This form applies the lofty style and conventions of Epic to trivial or petty subjects. Sometimes it ridicules or mocks at the epic conventions too. The Mock Epic like the Epic has books and cantos, invocations, battles, supernatural machinery, epic simile, epithets. It may begin in medias res and so many other conventions. One variety of mock epic is called Mock Heroic Poem. This was very popular in the 18th century. This is not long enough but not divided into books and cantos. One example we have is Dryden's 'MacFlecknoe.'

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Verse Epistle

- A letter in the form of a poem to a friend or a patron in a conversational style
- Moral, philosophical or literary theme
- Classical model: Horace's *Epistles*
- A favorite form of the 18th century poets
 - Pope's *An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1734)
 - W H Auden's *New Year Letter* (1940)
- Another Classical model: Ovid's *Epistles*



Now, let us move onto another form of poetry called Verse Epistle. Epistle is a letter. A verse epistle is a letter in the form of a poem to a friend or to a patron in a conversational style. It usually deals with moral, philosophical, or literary themes. We have classical models for this verse epistle form. Horace has written a number of epistles. A favourite form of the 18th century poets is this verse epistle. One of the good examples that we have is Alexander Pope's 'An Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot.' In 20th century also we have a verse epistle in W H Auden's 'New Year Letter.' Another classical model for this verse epistle is Ovid's 'Epistles.'

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Elegy

- Originally a formal lyric poem in the Elegiac meter
- Included various subjects like love, war, politics, and lamentations for the dead
- Confined to a mournful song for a friend or a public figure after the Renaissance
- Chiefly concerned with the question of living in a meaningless world due to the fact of death
- A melancholic and reflective poem on the ephemeral life and its sorrows

Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"
(1751)



Let us examine this Elegy. It is a serious art form in literature. There are many well-known elegies in English literature. It was originally a formal lyric poem in the Elegiac meter. It included various subjects like love, war, politics, and lamentations for the dead. But gradually in course of time it came to be confined to a mournful song for a friend or a public figure after the Renaissance. It is chiefly concerned with the question of living in a meaningless world due to the fact of death. It is a melancholic and reflective poem on the ephemeral life and its sorrows. The most famous elegy that we have in English is Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.'

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Pastoral Elegy



- A melancholic and reflective poem
- A lamentation for the dead in an elaborate style
- The pastoral conventions of shepherds, plain language, rural life, nature,

Spenser's *Astrophel* (1595) - Sir Philip Sidney

Milton's *Lycidas* (1637) - Edward King

Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) - John Keats

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) - A H Hallam

Arnold's *Thyrsis* (1866) - A H Clough



A closely related form is Pastoral Elegy. Elegy in the setting of a pastoral environment near rural environment. It is a melancholic and reflective poem. It deals with sad thoughts and ideas. It is also a lamentation for the dead in an elaborate style. The pastoral conventions of shepherd's plain language, rural life, and nature are brought into this form. We have again a wonderful list of pastoral elegy poems. Spenser's 'Astrophel' is a pastoral elegy in honor of Sir Philip Sidney. Milton's 'Lycidas' is a pastoral elegy for his friend Edward King. Shelley's 'Adonais' is a memorial poem for his friend John Keats. Lord Tennyson wrote this poem 'In Memoriam' for his friend A H Hallam, from whose death, Tennyson was not able to

relieve himself. He was grieving for a long time. Similarly, we have Matthew Arnold's poem 'Thyrsis' for his friend A H Clough.

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Songs



- Songs of Solomon
 "Your temples behind your veil are
 like the halves of a pomegranate."
- Songs of Wyatt and Surrey
- Songs in plays by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson
- Donne's songs
- Blake's *Songs of Innocence*
- Blake's *Songs of Experience*
- Bob Dylan's songs



Poetry is all about song. Here we have a list of songs. Songs about the joys and sorrows of life. We begin with songs of Solomon. Here we have just a small extract from this song of Solomon,

"Your temples behind your veil are

like the halves of a pomegranate."

Songs of Thomas Wyatt and Surrey in 16th century we have. We have a number of songs in the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

Similarly, Donne wrote quite a lot of songs. When it comes to Willy Blake, we have 2 volumes of poetry called 'Songs of Innocence' and 'Songs of Experience' and recently we have Bob Dylan. He writes all songs. They are poems for which he was awarded this Nobel prize.

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Lyrical Ballad



- Ballad is an impersonal narrative poem
- Lyric is a personal emotional poem
- Lyrical ballad – a story told emotionally by a speaker in a simple conversational style

Wordsworth's "We Are Seven," "Tintern Abbey"

A stanza from "We are Seven"

"Sisters and brothers, little Maid,

How many may you be?"

"How many? Seven in all," she said,

And wondering looked at me.



We have Lyrical Ballad. It is a combination of lyric and ballad. Ballad is an impersonal narrative poem. On the other hand, lyric is a personal emotional poem. These are combined together in a lyrical ballad. It deals with a story. It is told emotionally by a speaker in a simple conversational style.

William Wordsworth is a well-known poet of this form. He has a poem called, 'We Are Seven,' another poem 'Tintern Abbey.' These are included in his collection of poems called 'Lyrical Ballads.' In this volume we also have the lyrical ballad of Coleridge as well. In this context we have a stanza from this short poem 'We are Seven,'

"Sisters and brothers, little Maid,

How many may you be?

"How many? Seven in all," she said,

And wondering looked at me."

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Dramatic Monologue

- A poem in which an imaginary or mythical or historical speaks to a silent audience and reveals his own character
 - It deals with emotions but not entirely lyrical.
 - A single character speaks but not a soliloquy.
 - It is not about the poet's own thoughts/ feelings.
 - It begins at a critical moment in the speaker's life
- Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842)
Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842)



Next, we move on to the Dramatic Monologue form. It is a well-known poetic form. It is a poem in which an imaginary or mythical or historical character speaks to a silent audience and reveals his own character. It deals with emotions but not entirely lyrical. It has a single character speaking throughout the poem, but it is not a soliloquy because it has a listener, an implied listener.

It is not about the poet's own thoughts or feelings. It usually deals with somebody else. It begins at a critical moment in the speaker's life. We have 2 well known examples. Tennyson's poem 'Ulysses' is a dramatic monologue. Browning's dramatic monologue is 'My Last Duchess.' Both of them were published in 1842. We have one question, who invented this form first? Tennyson published first; Browning wrote it first. That is how critics have come to a kind of conclusion.

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Blank Verse

- First used by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey
 - Used extensively by Marlowe, Shakespeare, etc.
 - Most popular and flexible form of English verse
 - Close to the rhythm of common speech
 - Unrhymed iambic pentameter:
10 syllables, 5 stresses
 - Run-on lines with varied pauses
 - Used in dramatic, narrative, and meditative poems
 - Gives a full impression of life's complexity
- Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850)



Blank verse is not exactly a poetic form. It is used in various poetic forms actually; it is one way of using language. It was first used by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey in 16th century. It was used extensively by Marlowe and Shakespeare in the Renaissance period in their plays and also poems. It is considered to be a popular and flexible form of English Verse. The reason is it is close to the rhythm of common speech. It is usually unrhymed and in iambic pentameter.

So, a line which is unrhymed and in iambic pentameter with the 10 syllables and 5 stresses is called blank verse. It may have run-on lines. It may have varied pauses. It is used in all kind of poetic forms drama, narrative and meditative poems. It gives a full impression of life's complexity. One example we have is Wordsworth's epic poem 'The Prelude.' Milton's epic 'The Paradise Lost' is also in blank verse form.

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Free Verse



- French verse libre
- Verse is a metrical composition
- Free verse is a non-metrical composition.
- A poem without regular line length or rhyme scheme
- Characterized by cadences, repetitions of words, phrases, clauses, and lines
- Long-lined poems – Blake, Whitman, Ginsberg
- Short-lined poems – e. e. cummings, A R Ammons



Another form that we have to deal with is Free Verse. It does not follow any form at all. That is why it is called free verse. In French it is called V Libre. Verse is a metrical composition. In contrast free verse is a non-metrical composition. It does not follow any particular kind of meter or measure. It is a poem without regular line length or rhyme scheme. It is characterized by cadences, flow of lines, songs, repetition of words, phrases, clauses and lines.

We have 2 kinds of free verse. We may have long lined poems as we have in the poetry of Blake, Whitman and Ginsberg. We may have very short lines in the poems of E. E. Cummings and A R Ammons. Even in the case of E. E. Cummings we have a poem called 'Loneliness.' Loneliness, all letters are given individually in one line.

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Verse Paragraph



- A group of lines constituting a section of a poem
- Decided by sense, not stanza form
- Usually found in long narrative poems
- Indicated by indentation and a capital letter

Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667/1674)

- **Indeterminate length:** Unrhymed - blank verse;
Rhymed - couplet, terza rima
- **Specified length:** Sonnet (14), limerick (5), haiku (3)
- **Sequence of stanzas** – quatrain, ottava rima



We also have to know about Verse Paragraph, when we deal with forms of poetry. This verse paragraph is a group of lines constituting a section of a poem. It is decided by some sense not stanza form. Some common idea will go together to make a verse paragraph. It is usually found in long narrative poems and the divisions are indicated by indentation that is beginning of the next line will have some break and then continue and the indentation will begin with a capital letter.

Milton's 'Paradise Lost' is a good example of having various verse paragraphs and line lengths will be indeterminate in some cases. Unrhymed usually blank verse, in rhymed form we may have couplets, terza rimas. We may have specified line length in some poems like sonnet, limerick and haiku. In sonnet 14 lines are there; In limerick 5 lines are there; In haiku 3 lines are there. And in some cases, we have sequence of stanzas- quatrain, ottava rima- 8 lines. So, where we do not have this specified stanza, lines like sonnet, limerick we have verse paragraphs.

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Stanza - Room

- **Two lines:** Couplet - Chaucer, Shakespeare, Heroic couplet - Dryden, Pope
- **Three lines:** triplet/ tercet; Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"
- **Four lines:** quatrain; ballad, Gray's "Elegy"
- **Five lines:** quintets; Frost's "The Road Not Taken"
- **Six lines:** Sestet; Elizabeth Bishop's "Sestina"
- **Seven lines:** Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence"
- **Eight lines:** Octave; Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"
- **Nine lines:** Spenserian stanza in *The Faerie Quee*
- **Ten lines:** Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn"



Generally, poems are arranged in the form of Stanzas. One line, two lines, three lines, four lines like this we have. Normally two lines will be there, and two lined poems are called couplets if they are rhymed and we may also have heroic couplets as in the case of Dryden and Pope. Couplets are usually associated with poets like Chaucer and Shakespeare; other poets also may have.

Three-line poems also we have. They are called Triplets or Tercets. One good poem that we have in English literature for this three-line poem is Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind.' Four-line poems we may have many. When a poem has 4 lines the stanza form is called quatrain. Usually ballads are in quatrain stanza form. Gray's Elegy has stanzas in the form of quatrains.

We also have five-line stanzas. They are called quintets. Our common well-known poem 'The Road Not Taken' by Frost is in the 5-line stanzas. Next, we have six-line poems. These are called sestet, already we have seen this in sonnet form. Here the whole poem is in the form of sestets. One example is Elizabeth Bishop's poem called 'Sestina.'

We also have seven-line poems. One example we have is Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence.' When we move to eight-line poems, we may call it Octave. One example that we have is Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium.' Then we come to nine-line poems. One of the best practitioners of this nine-line poem is Spenser. This is specifically called Spenserian Stanza. The whole epic the 'Faerie Queene' is in the

form of Spenserian stanzas. We also have ten-line poems. Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' is in the form of ten-line poems. We can go beyond this. They may be uncommon. These are usually common ones.

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Summary



- Ballad, Dream Poetry
- Sonnet, Hymn, Ode
- Epic, Mock Epic, Verse Epistle
- Elegy, Song, Lyrical Ballad, Pastoral
- Dramatic Monologue
- Blank verse
- Free verse
- Verse paragraph
- Stanza Forms



In this presentation what we have looked at is the different kinds of poems and the stanza forms or the verse forms in English literature. We dealt with ballad, dream poetry, sonnet, hymn, ode. Hymn is a poem in praise of something. Some it may be God. We have seen epic, mock epic, verse epistle. We also looked at elegy, song, lyrical ballad, pastoral elegy. We spent some time on dramatic monologue. We defined blank verse, differentiated it from free verse. We saw how poetry is arranged in the form of words paragraphs and stanza forms.

Hope you have learned many things about the way in which poems are arranged in lines on pages. Thank you.