

Question: - What is the Heroic Couplet?

Answer: - A heroic couplet is a group of two lines rhyming at the end, both the lines being iambic pentameters. Now, what is an iambic pentameter? A pentameter is a line consisting of five "feet" and if everyone of these five feet is an "iamb" or "iambic foot", the line is an iambic pentameter. An iambic foot consists of two syllables, the first of which is unstressed and the second, stressed. For instance the word divide makes an iambic foot in verse for its first syllable (di) is unstressed and the second (vide) is stressed.

His use of the Heroic Couplet: - The heroic couplet was first used by Chaucer with great mastery and skill. The Elizabethans, too, used it but they used it like loose blank verse with the sense running on from one couplet to another and often till the very end of paragraph. Dryden used it with

great force and he too retained much of the freedom and flexibility of the earlier masters. Pope, on the other hand says Tillotson, regards the heroic couplet, "as if they were stanzas, self contained."

The chief characteristics of Pope's use of the couplet may be summed up as follows:

- (a) His couplets are closed, that is to say, the sense does not run on from one couplet to another. The sense is complete, or nearly complete, with each couplet, every couplet thus tends to become a unit by itself and can be taken out and enjoyed irrespective of its content. This makes his couplets rather rigid and flexible and wanting in the freedom and ease of Dryden.
- (b) In each couplet the "caesura" or pause is placed exactly in the ~~middle~~ middle, after the fourth syllable and before the sixth. The caesura is not varied and this results in monotony.

(c) There is no splitting of couplets as in Dryden and others. "Splitting" means that the sense of anyone of the two lines is linked up with the sense of the couplet which has preceded or which follows. Pope never splits his couplets he makes each of them a separate unit by itself.

(d) At the, there is generally a single rhyme that is only one "syllable" of the last word of each of the two lines of a couplet rhymes. The use of double rhyme, that is two syllables rhyming with each other, is rare with Pope.

(e) His use of the heroic couplet is characterized by brevity and preciseness. His couplets are well polished, refined and correct. They have a rare brilliance. They are epigrammatic and easily memorable. As Swift puts it, "Pope can fix in one couplet more sense than I can do in

Size. Pope is matchless for condensation and concentration.

(f) Pope does not make use of Alexandrines, that is, lines of twelve syllables, and triplets, that is, three lines rhyming together, as was done by Dryden. There is no looseness, each couplet stands by itself, and is well balanced and compact.

The end.

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