



Poetry Types

Acrostic

A poem in which certain letters of the lines, usually the first letters, form a word or message relating to the subject.

Dust and drought
Reddening the sky
Outback dustbowl
Unrelenting thirst
Goading our resolve
Heat and dust
Testing our faith

There are famous examples, eg Edgar Allan Poe *An Acrostic* (1829).

Ballad

A long poem (or song) that tells a story through a series of stanzas.

Most ballads have these elements:

- An abrupt beginning
- Simple language
- A story told through dialogue and action
- A chorus
- Four-line or six-line stanzas.

The Australian bush ballad is important to Australia's poetry tradition.

A.B. (Banjo) Paterson wrote many, including:

- the original lyrics of *Waltzing Matilda* (1887)
- *The Man from Snowy River* (1890).

Famous non-Australian ballads include:

- Lewis Carroll *The Walrus and the Carpenter* (1872)
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798).

Blank verse

A poem without rhyming lines, but often with a rhythmic pattern

eg William Wordsworth *Tintern Abbey* (1798).

Cinquain

A poem with a standard syllable pattern, like a haiku, of five lines and a total of 22 syllables in the pattern: 2,4,6,8,2.

Magpies
in my garden
pilfering the insects
lift their throats to sing and warble
Magic.

Concrete (or shape) poetry

A poem which creates a visual image on the page.

It is meant to be viewed rather than read aloud.

eg Johnathan Sluder *Broken Car* (2001)

Dramatic monologue

A poem which presents someone other than the poet addressing an audience.

It offers an insight into the feelings of the speaker.

Examples of dramatic monologues occur in poems such as *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning (a duke speaking to his messenger), and plays such as *The Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare.

Elegy

A poem which laments the death of someone, eg Dylan Thomas *Elegy* (1952).

Epic

A long narrative poem which tells of heroic deeds or significant national events.

Famous examples include:

- Homer *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
- Wordsworth *The Prelude*
- John Milton *Paradise Lost*

Free verse

A poem that does not use traditional rhythm or rhyme, and therefore often sounds like natural speech.

It is popular with modern poets, as there are no restrictions on expressing their thoughts and emotions.

Haiku

A form of Japanese poetry which uses three lines and 17 syllables arranged in the pattern 5, 7, 5.

For example, this translation of a traditional haiku by Basho:

The first cold shower
Even the monkey seems to want
A little coat of straw

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Limerick

A poem of five lines, with humorous intent and a strict rhyme scheme.

Edward Lear ca 1875:

There was a Young Person of Smyrna
Whose grandmother threatened to burn her;
But she seized on the cat,

And said 'Granny, burn that!
You incongruous old woman of Smyrna!'

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Lyric

A poem which expresses the personal feelings and thoughts of a speaker.

Most poems, except for ballads and epics, are lyrics. Three common themes in traditional lyric poems include:

- Love
- Lamentation (sadness)
- Nature

Narrative poem

A poem that is organised into stanzas and tells a story using narrative elements of orientation, complication, series of events and resolution.

Examples of narrative poems:

Robert Browning *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*
Alfred Noyes *The Highwayman*
Ogden Nash *The Tale of Custard the Dragon*

Ode

A long lyric poem that addresses, and often praises, someone or something. It has a stately quality.

Examples include:

John Keats *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819)
John Keats *Ode to a Grecian Urn*
Lorraine Nisbet *Ode to a Butterfly* (2001)

Rhyming couplets

Pairs of lines that rhyme, often used in poems that recount an event

Richard Wilbur *A Barred Owl*:

The warping night air having brought the boom
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,
We tell the wakened child that all she heard
Was an odd question from a forest bird,
Asking of us, if rightly listened to,
"Who cooks for you?" and then
"Who cooks for you?"

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Soliloquy

A poetic speech in a play that is spoken by a person alone on stage as if there were no audience present, or as if the audience is the speaker's confidante.

A famous soliloquy:

To be or not to be – that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep...

Shakespeare *Hamlet* (ca 1600)

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Sonnet

A traditional form of poem which has fourteen lines in iambic pentameter.

It may be divided into stanzas of varying lengths. There are two main forms of sonnet:

- Shakespearean
- Petrarchan (Italian)

Shakespeare *Sonnet 116*:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds (a)
Admit impediments, love is not love (b)
Which alters when it alteration finds, (a)
Or bends with the remover to remove. (b)
O no, it is an ever fixed mark (c)
That looks on tempests and is never shaken; (d)
It is the star to every wand'ring bark, (c)
Whose worth's unknown although his height

be taken (d)

Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks (e)

Within his bending sickle's compass come, (f)

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, (e)

But bears it out even to the edge of doom: (f)

If this be error and upon me proved, (g)

I never writ, nor no man ever loved. (g)

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Modern sonnets include:

- Gwen Harwood *Suburban Sonnet*
- John Magee *High Flight*
- Roy Campbell *The Serf*

Villanelle

A poem of five three-line stanzas concluding with a stanza of four lines.

They contain only two rhyme sounds, eg *ay, ill*.

Edwin Arlington Robinson *The House on the Hill* (1894):

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.
Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill.
They are all gone away.
Nor is there one to-day
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.
Why is it then we stray
Around the sunken sill?
They are all gone away,
And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.
There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

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