

# A few poetic genres

A poem is usually written in verse<sup>1</sup>, and consists of a number of lines<sup>2</sup>.

Several lines often form a stanza<sup>3</sup>.

Note too:

the caesura

Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely, but too well

William SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*

an enjambment or run-on line

## Types of poem

- **A ballad**: a narrative poem (which tells a story) and may be meant to be sung. It consists of quatrains which usually alternate lines of 4 and 3 stresses. Lines 2 and 4 rhyme.
- **An elegy**: a poem of lament for someone who has died, or something which has disappeared.
- **An epic poem**: a long narrative poem describing the actions of a hero, actions which are important for his nation or race. It often involves superhuman deeds<sup>4</sup>, battles, and the intervention of the gods.
- **Free verse**: verse without any particular form or rhythm.
- **An ode**: a lyric poem to celebrate someone or something. The tone is often elevated.
- **Pastoral**: a poem which describes the ideal life of shepherds and which praises a simple life in nature.
- **A sonnet**: a 14-line poem, used by Petrarch and very popular during the Elizabethan age. Petrarchan sonnets consist of 2 **quatrains** (a quatrain is a 4-line stanza) forming an **octave** + **two tercets** (a tercet is a three-line stanza) forming a **sestet**. Shakespearean sonnets consist of 3 quatrains + a **couplet** (a couplet = two lines of verse).
- **An acrostic**: a poem in which some letters (usually at the beginning of the lines) form a word.
- **A visual poem**: a poem in which the lines are arranged in such a way that they form a shape which often evokes the subject of the poem.
- **Concrete poetry**: A poem with a layout<sup>5</sup> (or typeface<sup>6</sup>, or colour) which is related to its meaning.



1. **verse**: *des vers, de la poésie*

2. **a line**: *un vers*

3. **a stanza**: *une strophe*

4. **a deed**: *une action*

5. **the layout**: *la disposition*

6. **the typeface**: *les caractères*