

## TYPES OF POEMS

**Ballad:** a narrative poem (tells a story) that is often dramatic or emotional. They are often written in quatrains (4 lines per stanza), have repeated refrains, are written in rhythmic verse, and may be sung.

### **Ballad of Birmingham**

BY DUDLEY RANDALL

*(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)*

“Mother dear, may I go downtown  
Instead of out to play,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
In a Freedom March today?”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For the dogs are fierce and wild,  
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
Aren’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.  
Other children will go with me,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
To make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For I fear those guns will fire.  
But you may go to church instead  
And sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,  
And bathed rose petal sweet,  
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
Was in the sacred place,  
But that smile was the last smile  
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,  
Her eyes grew wet and wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham  
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
Then lifted out a shoe.  
“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,  
But, baby, where are you?”

**Blank verse:** poetry that has regular meter (rhythm) but lacks rhyme.

## Mending Wall

BY ROBERT FROST

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."

**Free verse:** poetry that does not contain rhyme or meter (rhythm).

## Night Nurse

BY MICHAEL EARL CRAIG

This night nurse is different.  
She walks into my room and does not turn the light on.  
She thinks I am sleeping.  
I have just barely opened my left eye,  
am looking through the slightest slit,  
as moonlight exposes the room  
for what it really is — a collection  
of surfaces; lines and planes, mostly.  
The night nurse puts a foot up on the radiator  
and braces her clipboard on her knee  
as she appears to take down a few notes.  
I imagine she is working on a sonnet,  
and that her ankle looks like polished walnut.  
You imagine she is working on a crossword,  
and that her feet are killing her.  
The slightest slit is like an old gate  
at a Japanese tea garden at night,  
in the rain, that is supposed to be closed,  
that is supposed to be locked.  
“Someone has locked up poorly,” you’d say.  
“Incorrectly.” But no one has asked you.

**Epic:** a very long poem which tells the story of a hero or a significant event. It is not typically meant to be sung.

Examples are too long to include, but if you wish to search some well-known examples, google:

Beowulf, The Epic of Gilgamesh, Iliad, Odyssey, Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost, Ashtavakra

**Lyric poetry:** short poems which express a single feeling, mood, or opinion. (Elegies, odes, and sonnets are all forms of lyric poems).

**Elegy:** a sad poem that expresses sorrow (usually over someone who has died).

**Encounter** BY CZESLAW MILOSZ

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.  
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.  
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,  
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going  
The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.  
I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

**Ode:** a poem that expresses deep feeling or admiration for something (such as a person).

**ODE TO INCENSE CEDAR**

You rise among oak and ponderosa on the ridge,  
your bark corded like the knees of old temples.  
Your green skirts flounce the edge of meadow  
with its mazing paths and creeklets that meander  
down to depths of canyon, and forgetful river.

In this meadow, someone has built a tepee -  
cedar-bark bound together in the ancient way;  
shadowed, mysterious, a blessed house  
with crevices enfolding scent that floats on air,  
and holds the memory of whoever passes by.

Thunderclouds swirl the afternoon with weather.  
Still you stand, cambium-flute on ageless knees;  
at last, a silver spire that points to higher sky  
the traveler's spirit's caught in cedar-bark,  
wanderer long-gone, waking to each morning.

**Sonnet:** a poem with 14 lines of iambic pentameter and a fixed rhyme scheme

## Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18)

William Shakespeare, 1564 - 1616

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimmed;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,

When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.