

## Finding a form: A different shape 2

### Aim of the exercise:

### Play with the shape of the poem on the page

If you are in the V&A, choose a costume from the Fashion Gallery. Otherwise here is a selection of clothes for you to choose from.



If you have already completed the first exercise, you may opt to use the same garment or to choose a new one.

If the costume chosen is a long, thin gown, such as the Vionnet evening gown from the 1930s, write a long, thin poem about it.

If the costume chosen is wide, such as Vivienne Westwood's 'Watteau' dress from the Les Femmes collection, 1996), write a wide poem. Rhyming couplets might be suitable, with spaces between each pair of lines.

Dresses such as those by Vionnet are cut on the bias from single pieces of fabric. So the long, thin poem might be all in one piece.

The Westwood dress has a tight bodice and wide skirt. So the wider poem might begin with a series of couplets with short lines, followed by couplets made out of lines that grow longer as it comes to an end.

Again, if this exercise is done with a male suit, then a short, boxy poem or a long, elegant poem may result, depending on the costume you have chosen.

The point of this exercise is to think about the space a poem occupies on the page and make your words convey the costume visually as well as through sound and meaning.

## **The space around a poem**

Most beginning writers think about many other aspects of the poem they are writing before they think about the shape it makes on the page: rhyme, rhythm, stanza form, punctuation. Yet the first things we see when we look at a poem are its shape and the way that it occupies space. The visual qualities of a poem can be crucial to how we read it.

When you have completed the exercise, ask yourself these questions:

- Were you satisfied with the result?
- If not, what would you like to alter about the poem?
- What did you manage to convey about the dress/ suit?
- What do you wish you had done better?