

THE VILLANELLE

The villanelle is a complex and artificial form which can, nonetheless, generate an impression of simplicity and spontaneity. It is characterized by **nineteen lines** divided into **five tercets** and a final **four-line stanza**, using only **two rhymes**:

A B A A B A A B A A B A A B A A B A A

Lines 1 and 3 become strands woven throughout the poem in a complex pattern, even resembling a refrain since each line is repeated three times.

Refrain 1 (**R1**) = line 1 = lines 6, 12, and 18

Refrain 2 (**R2**) = line 3 = lines 9, 15, and 19

Originally, the form was used for poetic expression which was idyllic, delicate, simple, and slight. The two refrain lines, however, can be made thunderingly forceful producing an elemental gravity and power, as it has in the following most famous of all villanelles.

“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” By Dylan Thomas

1	Do not go gentle into that good night,	A	R1
2	Old age should burn and rave at close of day;	B	
3	Rage, rage against the dying of the light.	A	R2
4	Though wise men at their end know dark is right,		A
5	Because their words had forked no lightning they		B
6	Do not go gentle into that good night.	A	R1
7	Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright	A	
8	Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,	B	
9	Rage, rage against the dying of the light.	A	R2
10	Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,		A
11	And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,	B	
12	Do not go gentle into that good night.	A	R1
13	Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight	A	
14	Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,		B
15	Rage, rage against the dying of the light.	A	R2
16	And you, my father, there on the sad height,	A	
17	Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.	B	
18	Do not go gentle into that good night.	A	R1
19	Rage, rage against the dying of the light.	B	R2

MAD GIRL'S LOVE SONG: A Villanelle

by Sylvia Plath

I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;
I lift my lids and all is born again.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

5 The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,
And arbitrary blackness gallops in:
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

10 God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:
Exit seraphim and Satan's men:
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

15 I fancied you'd return the way you said,
But I grow old and I forget your name.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

I should have loved a thunderbird instead;
At least when spring comes they roar back again.
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

A Villanelle

by Sean Blair (Lawton Eisenhower)

I hate writing poetry!
If only my teacher knew,
She shouldn't do this to me.

5 It's even worse than geometry.
It's a terrible thing to do.
I hate writing poetry!

It's very plain to see,
I tell you it's true.
She shouldn't do this to me.

10 This is my final plea.
I can't write this for you.
I hate writing poetry!

15 I can't write a poem like "Persephone."
That would be hard to do.
She shouldn't do this to me.

I'd rather watch T.V.
Or try something new.
I hate writing poetry!
She shouldn't do this to me.

Villanelle for D.G.B.
by Marilyn Hacker

Every day our bodies separate,
exploded torn and dazed.
Not understanding what we celebrate

5 we grope through languages and hesitate
and touch each other, speechless and amazed;
and every day our bodies separate

us farther from our planned, deliberate
ironic lives. I am afraid, disphased,
not understanding what we celebrate

10 when our fused limbs and lips communicate
the unlettered power we have raised.
Every day our bodies' separate

routines are harder to perpetuate.
15 In wordless darkness we learn wordless praise,
not understanding what we celebrate;

wake to ourselves, exhausted, in the late
morning as the wind tears off the haze,
not understanding how we celebrate
our bodies. Every day we separate.

The Villanelle
by Sondra Ball

Musical and sweet, the villanelle,
like light reflected in a gentle rhyme,
moves to the ringing of a silver bell,

5 its form creating soft and tender spells.
Like the singing of distant silver chimes,
musical and sweet, the villanelle

flows through the heart, and builds a magic spell
from sunlight and from shadows, and, sublime,
moves to the ringing of a silver bell.

10 It never arcs into the sharp loud yell
of vast pipe organs. Soft its climb.
Musical and sweet, the villanelle,

like a tiny and translucent shell
15 catching sunlight in the summer time,
moves to the ringing of a silver bell.

Soft and gentle, tender and so frail,
like light pouring through petals of the lime,
musical and sweet, the villanelle
moves to the ringing of a silver bell.