

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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## Villanelle

(\_sjanger, \_lyrikk) En diktsjanger som opprinnelig ble brukt til diktning om livet på landet. Det latinske “villanus” betyr “landlig”. I nyere tid har det blitt skrevet villaneller om alle tenkelige temaer.

Diktene følger (vanligvis) dette mønsteret for strofer og enderim (ord med samme farge rimer, og understreket og kursiverte rim er identiske):

----- alle  
----- **glans**  
----- *falle*

----- **tralle**  
----- **stans**  
----- alle

----- **kalle**  
----- **sans**  
----- *falle*

----- **lalle**  
----- **vanns**  
----- alle

----- **gjalle**  
----- **hans**  
----- *falle*

----- **palle**  
----- **fillefrans**  
----- alle  
----- *falle*

“Denne diktform har et meget strengt strofesystem, som faktisk minner om et fullkomment mineral.” (André Bjerke i et intervju; Elseth 1979 s. 23) Bjerke skrev bl.a. “Villanelle” (1960).

“A villanelle is a poetic form with nineteen lines and a strict pattern of repetition and a rhyme scheme. Each villanelle is comprised of five tercets (i.e., a three-line stanza) followed by one quatrain (a stanza with four lines). The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated in an alternating pattern as the final line of each next tercet; those two repeated lines then form the final two lines of the entire poem. The rhyme scheme calls for those repeating lines to rhyme, and for the second line of every tercet to rhyme. Thus, the rhyme scheme looks like this: A1 b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 A2. Though the structure may sound complicated, in practice it is easy to see how the rules work. The word villanelle comes originally from the Italian word *villano*, meaning “peasant.” The *villanellas* and *villancicos* of the Renaissance period were Italian and Spanish songs made for dancing, which featured the pastoral theme appropriate for peasant dances. The contemporary definition of villanelle thus has changed quite a bit since its conception as a verse without strict rhyme scheme or repetition.” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/villanelle/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

“The rhyme-and-refrain pattern of the villanelle can be schematized as A1bA2 abA1 abA2 abA1 abA2 abA1A2 where letters (“a” and “b”) indicate the two rhyme sounds, upper case indicates a refrain (“A”), and numerals (1 and 2) indicate Refrain 1 and Refrain 2. The pattern is shown as an example in the poem “Do not go gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas, which is the poem most often used as an example of a villanelle:

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,

Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

[oversatt til dansk av Ingrid Mejer Jensen:

Gå ikke stiltørdigt ind i den gode nat,  
Alderdom skal gnistre og rase, når dagen svinder;  
Ras, ras imod det lys, der bliver mat.

Fordi deres ord aldrig flængede himlen, aldrig fik ret,  
Skønt de, døden nær, godt ved, at mørket vinder,  
Går gamle, kloge mænd ikke stiltørdigt ind i den gode nat.

Gode mænd, vel ovre den sidste bjergkam, råber som besat  
Op om den beskedne dåd, der kunne have strålet fra tinder,  
Ras, ras imod det lys, der bliver mat.

Og solen, som de indser, at de hele tiden har begrædt,  
Mænd, som har besunget den, grebet efter alt, der skinner,  
Gå ikke stiltørdigt ind i den gode nat.

Blinde øjne kunne gløde, som meteorer, muntert, brat,  
Men alvorsmænd på gravens rand, og med et blik, der blinder,  
Ras, ras imod det lys, der bliver mat.

Og du, min far, dér på dit sidste højdedrag, forladt,  
Med dine bistre tårer, forband, velsign mig nu, mens lyset svinder.  
Gå ikke stiltørdigt ind i den gode nat,  
Ras, ras imod det lys, der bliver mat.]

Refrain 1 (A1)

Line 2 (b)

Refrain 2 (A2)

Line 4 (a)

Line 5 (b)

Refrain 1 (A1)

Line 7 (a)

Line 8 (b)

Refrain 2 (A2)

Line 10 (a)

Line 11 (b)

Refrain 1 (A1)

Line 13 (a)

Line 14 (b)

Refrain 2 (A2)

Line 16 (a)

Line 17 (b)

Refrain 1 (A1)

Refrain 2 (A2)

Unlike many fixed verse poetic forms, the villanelle has no established meter, although most 19th-century villanelles have used trimeter or tetrameter and most 20th-century villanelles have used pentameter. Slight alteration of the refrain line is permissible.

The form started as a simple ballad-like song with no fixed form; this fixed quality would only come much later, from the poem “Villanelle (J’ay perdu ma Tourterelle)” (1606) by Jean Passerat. From this point, its evolution into the “fixed form” used in the present day is debated. Despite its French origins, the majority of villanelles have been written in English, a trend which began in the late nineteenth century. The villanelle has been noted as a form that frequently treats the subject of obsessions, and one which appeals to outsiders; its defining feature of repetition prevents it from having a conventional tone.

In the villanelle’s repetition of lines, the form is often used, and properly used, to deal with one or another degree of obsession, such as in Sylvia Plath’s “Mad Girl’s Love Song” amongst other examples. Repetition allows the possibility for the form to evoke, through the relationship between the repeated lines, a feeling of dislocation and is what some have termed a paradigm for schizophrenia. This repetition of lines has been considered to prevent villanelles from possessing a conventional tone and that instead they are closer in form to a song or lyric poetry. Stephen Fry says that the villanelle “is a form that seems to appeal to outsiders, or those who might have cause to consider themselves as such”, having a “playful artifice” which suits “rueful, ironic reiteration of pain or fatalism.” In spite of this, the villanelle has also often been used for light verse, as for instance Louis Untermeyer’s “Lugubrious Villanelle of Platitudes” or the song by They Might Be Giants called “Hate the Villanelle.”

On the relationship between form and content, Anne Ridler noted in an introduction to her own poem “Villanelle for the Middle of the Way” a point made by T. S. Eliot, that “to use very strict form is a help, because you concentrate on the technical difficulties of mastering the form, and allow the content of the poem a more unconscious and freer release,” which sounds so very Post Modern. In an introduction to his own take on the form entitled “Missing Dates,” William Empson

suggested that while the villanelle is a “very rigid form,” W. H. Auden – in his long poem “The Sea and the Mirror” – had nonetheless “made it sound absolutely natural like the innocent girl talking.” ” (anonym i <http://closetprofessor.blogspot.no/2015/08/a-poetic-lesson-villanelle.html>; lesedato 02.05.18)

“The villanelle (‘rustic song’) [...] is based on an Italian folksong of the late fifteenth century; it flourished from the time of the Pléiade [en gruppe franske diktere på 1500-tallet] until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Like many other French forms it was popularized in English by the group of poets associated with Dobson and Henley. It is, however, one of the few forms that has been adopted by several twentieth-century poets: after Wilde’s ‘Theocritus’ it appeared in E. A. Robinson’s ‘House on a Hill’ and Pound’s ‘Villanelle: The Psychological Hour’. Empson used it in ‘Villanelle’ and ‘Missing Dates’, Auden in ‘My Dear One is Mine’ (*The Sea and the Mirror*) and ‘Time will say nothing but I told you so’. It occurs as late as 1952 in Dylan Thomas’s ‘Do not go gentle into that good night’, a truly excellent poem.” (Häublein 1978 s. 39-40)

“It is believed that the French poet Théodore de Banville defined the form in the late nineteenth century, though villanelles became much more popular in England than it ever did in France. Though the form is quite strict in its rules, it is not all that difficult to write a villanelle; indeed, eight of the nineteen lines are repetitions. The difficulty is in making this repetition seem new or important each time. Many poets have played just a bit with the repetition of lines so that there is a slight change, either in the insertion or deletion of a word, or in changing the tense or punctuation of the repeated lines. The function of the repetition often can seem a bit obsessive, and, indeed, many villanelles center around a central issue a poet is trying to work out in a manner that sounds circular and obsessive. [...] the most famous example of a villanelle of all time: Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night.” Unlike some other authors, Thomas chose not to alter his repeating lines whatsoever, and we see them reproduced exactly the same in each repetition. The lines in and of themselves are very powerful, and their repetition serves only to make Thomas’s forceful message that much stronger.” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/villanelle/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

“A villanelle is a poetic form which entered English language poetry in the late 1800s from the imitation of French models. Although it is one of the most technically demanding and difficult of all verse-forms, the villanelle has become in the last century one of the most popular forms of English poetry. Traditionally speaking, a villanelle is a poem of 19 lines written in six stanzas. The first stanza of a villanelle is of particular importance, because the first and third lines of the first stanza are alternatively repeated as the last line of each of the following stanzas. In the last stanza, which is four lines in length, both the first and third lines are included as the concluding couplet of the poem. This restraint puts an immense amount of strain on the first and third lines of the poem, as they must be versatile enough to be repeated several times at different points in the poem without

becoming redundant or meaningless. Ideally, the repeated lines of the villanelle should be subtle enough that as each line is repeated its meaning continues to change and evolve. In addition to this restraint, the non-repeated lines of the villanelle must rhyme with each other.

Perhaps because of its formal complexity, the villanelle has become a sort of tour-de-force for English poets, and it has remained popular since its introduction in the nineteenth century. A number of poets of distinction have made their attempts at the form and produced beautiful poems in the process, including Elizabeth Bishop, W.H. Auden, and Dylan Thomas. In recent decades, the villanelle has only increased in popularity. Many contemporary poets have made slight adjustments to the form, such as dropping the restriction of 19 lines per poem, or rephrasing the repeated lines slightly with each repetition; all of these changes have only increased the villanelle's accessibility to modern audiences, and it continues to be one of the most interesting verse-forms in the history of English poetry.

### History of the Form

Many published works mistakenly claim that the strict modern form of the villanelle originated with the medieval troubadours, but in fact medieval and Renaissance villanelles were simple ballad-like songs with no fixed form or length. Such songs were associated with the country and were thought to be sung by farmers and shepherds, in contrast to the more complex madrigals associated with the more sophisticated city and court life. The French word *villanelle* comes from the Italian word *villanella*, which derives from the Latin *villa* (farm) and *villano* (farmhand); to any poet before the mid-nineteenth century, the word *villanelle* or *villanella* would have simply meant "country song," with no particular form implied. The modern nineteen-line dual-refrain form of the villanelle derives from nineteenth-century admiration of the only Renaissance poem in that form – a poem about a turtledove by Jean Passerat (1534-1602) entitled "Villanelle." The chief French popularizer of the villanelle form was the nineteenth-century author Théodore de Banville.

### The villanelle in English

Although the villanelle is usually labeled "a French form," by far the majority of villanelles are in English. Edmund Gosse, influenced by Théodore de Banville, was the first English writer to praise the villanelle and bring it into fashion with his 1877 essay "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse." Gosse, Henry Austin Dobson, Oscar Wilde, and Edwin Arlington Robinson were among the first English practitioners. Most modernists disdained the villanelle, which became associated with the overwrought and sentimental aestheticism and formalism of the 1800s. James Joyce included a villanelle ostensibly written by his adolescent fictional alter-ego Stephen Dedalus in his 1914 novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, probably to show the immaturity of Stephen's literary abilities. William

Empson revived the villanelle more seriously in the 1930s, and his contemporaries and friends W. H. Auden and Dylan Thomas also picked up the form. Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" is perhaps the most renowned villanelle of all. Theodore Roethke and Sylvia Plath wrote villanelles in the 1950s and 1960s, and Elizabeth Bishop wrote a particularly famous and influential villanelle, "One Art," in 1976. The villanelle reached an unprecedented level of popularity in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of the New Formalism. Since then, many contemporary poets have written villanelles, and they have often varied the form in innovative ways.

## Form

The villanelle has no established meter, although most nineteenth-century villanelles had eight or six syllables per line and most twentieth-century villanelles have ten syllables per line. The essence of the form is its distinctive pattern of rhyme and repetition, with only two rhyme-sounds ("a" and "b") and two alternating refrains that resolve into a concluding couplet." (<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Villanelle>; lesedato 11.04.18)

"This French syllabic form has no set number of syllables per line; common choices seem to be between eight and eleven. (English versions of the villanelle sometimes appear in accentual syllabics, featuring a perennial favorite, iambic pentameter.) The villanelle carries a pattern of only two rhymes, and is marked most distinctively by its alternating refrain, which appears initially in the first and third lines of the opening tercet. In all, it comprises five tercets and a concluding quatrain. Before the villanelle was made literary by the French in the late 1500s, it existed as a villanella, "an old Italian folk song with an accompanying dance." [...] The word villanelle, or villanesque, was used toward the end of the sixteenth century to describe literary imitations of rustic songs. Such villanelles were alike in exhibiting a refrain which testified to their ultimate popular origin. The villanelle was, in a sense, invented by Jean Passerat (1534-1602). [...] Passerat's poem about a turtledove is said to be the singular originator of the scheme [...] It is useful to describe the villanelle as a form in which power resides in the interplay of constant (repeating) and variable elements ... a major challenge of the villanelle: packing the second through fifth tercets with appropriately varied and dense material that 'balances' and justifies the repeated material." (Mandy Michno og Matt Jolly i [http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/forms\\_of\\_verse/reports2000/page8.html](http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/forms_of_verse/reports2000/page8.html); lesedato 10.05.13)

"Author Philip K. Jason sees the villanelle as presenting a three-part structure of meaning: "introduction, development, and conclusion ... this tendency for the material to split into three sections gives the villanelle form an affinity with basic cognitive and expository processes. Technically, the three parts derive from the relative weight and position of the repeating lines." Also in this vein, he discusses the idea that the villanelle lends itself nicely to "duality, dichotomy, and debate."

[...] On the relation of form to function, Jason asserts that “the villanelle is often used, and properly used, to deal with one or another degree of obsession.” He takes this interpretation rather seriously, saying that “There is even the potential for the two repeating lines to form a paradigm for schizophrenia ...The mind may not fully know itself or its subject, may not be in full control, and yet it still tries, still festers and broods in a closed room towards a resolution that is at least pretended by the final couplet linking of the refrain lines.” [...] from “Modern Versions of the Villanelle,” by Philip K. Jason. *College Literature*, 1980.” (Mandy Michno og Matt Jolly i <http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/formsofverse/reports2000/page8.html>; lesedato 10.05.13)

Den irske forfatteren Oscar Wildes “Pan: Double Villanelle” (1880) “is a two-part poem which bizarrely compares the classical pastoral scene with glum modern England, and then with Renaissance England, in a strange assortment of references and contradictions which leave the reader unsure of the exact kind of “Hellenic ideal” Wilde is advocating [...] Wilde had already acknowledged Theocritus as the creator of the enchanting pastoral world in “Theocritus: A Villanelle”: indeed, “Pan: Double Villanelle” might be a variation on a theme. The villanelle itself, a French form of lyric verse, pays homage to the pastoral genre, “villa” being Latin for a country house or farm.” (<http://oscholars-oscholars.com/may-i-say/jessica-contents/jessica-i-ii/>; lesedato 18.05.15)

“Elizabeth Bishop’s famous example of villanelle, “One Art,” [1976] is slightly looser with the rules, though she does stick to them fairly closely. For example, the lines that end with the word “disaster” have only that final word in common, and are quite different leading up to the word. Bishop is also a bit freer with the rhyming words, choosing half rhyme rather than perfect rhyme in some cases. For example, she choose near rhymes for “disaster” such as “fluster,” “last, or,” and “gesture.” Similarly “intent” and “continent” have the same final vowel and consonant combination, yet the stress pattern of “continent” makes it not a perfect rhyme for “intent.” Still, Bishop has chosen the villanelle form for a reason. She builds up to the final quatrain with insisting that “the art of losing isn’t hard to master,” yet it’s clear that there is some verbal irony here and that it is indeed difficult to lose a loved one. [...] Theodore Roethke’s poem “The Waking” [1953] is another famous and lovely example of a villanelle. He is somewhere between Thomas and Bishop in terms of how closely he sticks to the villanelle rules. Generally his lines rhyme with either “slow” or “fear,” though he also chooses near rhymes of “you,” “how,” “do” and “there,” “stair,” and “air.” He also slightly varies the second repeating line of “I learn by going where I have to go.”” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/villanelle/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

Den amerikanske dikteren Marilyn Hacker har skrevet noen villaneller som er inkludert i samlingen *Presentation Piece* (1974).



“When teaching poetry writing workshops to classical autistics, I invariably ask them to write a villanelle. The first time I did so, I was astonished at how quickly and effectively they managed the task; in the same amount of time, my “control group” of nonautistic education professors managed maybe six or seven of the required nineteen lines. One autist claimed that the form itself was autistic – its perseverative, morphing refrains were “like the patterns of light on her front lawn,” she typed. [...] [Tito Rajarshi] Mukhopadhyay’s most recent book of poems, *I Am Not a Poet, But I Write Poetry*, contains three villanelles and a number of pantoums.” (Ralph James Savarese i <http://www.lisazunshine.net/>; lesedato 10.03.16) Mukhopadhyay ble født i India i 1989 og fikk som barn diagnosen autisme.

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