

# The Villanelle

## Rhyme and Repetition

# What Is a Villanelle?

A villanelle is a nineteen-line poem divided into five tercets (three-line stanzas) and a final quatrain. Each tercet has the rhyme scheme *aba*. The quatrain has the rhyme scheme *abaa*.

*aba* }  
*aba* }  
*aba* } Tercets  
*aba* }  
*aba* }

*abaa* } Quatrain

# Repetition

The rhyme scheme isn't the only strict rule of the villanelle. This form also uses a distinct pattern of repetition.

- Lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza are used as refrains throughout the rest of the poem.
  - Line 1 is repeated as lines 6, 12, and 18.
  - Line 3 is repeated as lines 9, 15, and 19.
- The two lines used as refrains (lines 1 and 3) are paired as the final couplet.

## “The House on the Hill” by Edwin Arlington Robinson

They are all gone away,  
 The House is shut and still,  
 There is nothing more to say.

*a*  
*b*  
*a*

There is ruin and decay  
 In the House on the Hill:  
 They are all gone away,  
 There is nothing more to say.

*a*  
*b*  
*a*  
*a*

Through broken walls and gray  
 The winds blow bleak and shrill:  
 They are all gone away.

*a*  
*b*  
*a*

Nor is there one to-day  
 To speak them good or ill:  
 There is nothing more to say.

*a*  
*b*  
*a*

Why is it then we stray  
 Around the sunken sill?  
 They are all gone away,

*a*  
*b*  
*a*

And our poor fancy-play  
 For them is wasted skill:  
 There is nothing more to say.

*a*  
*b*  
*a*



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# A Gift from the French

The villanelle originated in France. Originally the term *villanelle*, which means “rural or countrylike,” described light, lyric poems about the countryside.



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*Hot Day in the Harvest Field* by William Gosling ca. 1877

# The Modern Villanelle

- Modern-day villanelles are written on a variety of topics and do not require a light tone.
- Many modern poets have crafted poems in this complex form, although some may alter the form slightly for effect.
  - Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night”
  - W. H. Auden, “Villanelle”
  - Theodore Roethke, “The Waking”
  - Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art”

## What Have You Learned?

1. The villanelle form originated in France.  
a. true                      b. false
2. A villanelle includes only two rhymes repeated throughout the poem.  
a. true                      b. false
3. Modern-day villanelles always have a light tone.  
a. true                      b. false



**The End**