

# Villanello

## Definition of Villanelle

Villanelle is derived from the Italian word *villano*, which means “peasant.” In fact, a villanelle is a dance song coupled with pastoral themes. In literature, it is defined as a poetic device that which requires a poem to have 19 lines and a fixed form. It has five tercets (first 15 lines), a [quatrain](#) (last four lines), and a [couplet](#) at the end of the quatrain.

## Major Features of Villanelle

Here are the major characteristics of a villanelle:

There is no well-organized [meter](#) in a villanelle, but it has a set [rhyme](#) scheme.

There are no fixed numbers of syllables.

The refraining pattern of a typical villanelle is arranged as shown below:

**(A1) [refrain 1](#)**

Line 2 (b)

**(A2) refrain 2**

Line 4 (a)

Line 5 (b)

**(A1) refrain 1**

Line 7 (a)

Line 8 (b)

**(A2) refrain 2**

Line 10 (a)

Line 11 (b)

**(A1) refrain 1**

Line 13 (a)

Line 14 (b)

**(A2) refrain 2**

Line 16 (a)

Line 17 (b)

**(A1) refrain 1**

**(A2) refrain 2**

Here, the letters “a” and “b” denote two rhyming sounds, while “A” indicates refrain, and the numerals “1” and “2” denote refrain 1 and refrain 2 respectively.

## Examples of Villanelle in Literature

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**Example #1: *Mad Girl's Love Song* (By Sylvia Plath)**

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**“I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead; (A1)**

I lift my lids and all is born again. (a)

**(I think I made you up inside my head.) (A2)**

The stars go waltzing out in blue and red, (a)

And arbitrary blackness gallops in: (b)

**I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead. (A1)**

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed (a)

And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane. (b)

**(I think I made you up inside my head.) (A2)**

God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade: (a)

Exit seraphim and Satan's men: (b)

**I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead. (A1)**

I fancied you'd return the way you said, (a)

But I grow old and I forget your name. (b)

**(I think I made you up inside my head.) (A2)**

I should have loved a thunderbird instead; (a)

At least when spring comes they roar back again. (b)

**I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead. (A1)**

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**Example #2: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (By James Joyce)**

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**Are you not weary of ardent ways, (A1)**

Lure of the fallen seraphim? (b)

**Tell no more of enchanted days. (A2)**

Your eyes have set man's heart ablaze (a)

And you have had your will of him. (b)

**Are you not weary of ardent ways? (A1)**

Above the flame the smoke of praise (a)

Goes up from ocean rim to rim. (b)

**Tell no more of enchanted days. (A2)**

Our broken cries and mournful lays (a)

Rise in one eucharistic hymn. (b)

**Are you not weary of ardent ways? (A1)**

While sacrificing hands upraise (a)

The chalice flowing to the brim, (b)

**Tell no more of enchanted days. (A2)**

And still you hold our longing gaze (a)

With languorous look and lavish limb! (b)

Are you not weary of ardent ways? (A1)

**Tell no more of enchanted days. (A2)**

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**Example #3: *Theocritus* (By Oscar Wilde)**

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**O Singer of Persephone! (A1)**

In the dim meadows desolate (b)

**Dost thou remember Sicily? (A2)**

Still through the ivy flits the bee (a)

Where Amaryllis lies in state; (b)

**O Singer of Persenhone! (A1)**

Simætha calls on Hecate  
And hears the wild dogs at the gate;  
**Dost thou remember Sicily? (A2)**

Still by the light and laughing sea  
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate:  
**O Singer of Persephone! (A1)**

And still in boyish rivalry  
Young Daphnis challenges his mate:  
**Dost thou remember Sicily? (A2)**

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee,  
For thee the jocund shepherds wait,  
**O Singer of Persephone! (A1)**  
**Dost thou remember Sicily? (A2)**

Oscar Wilde is famous for using villanelle in his poems.

### **Function of Villanelle**

Villanelle is divided into three segments. The first segment is called the “introduction.” The second is called the “development,” and the third is called the “conclusion.” Villanelle builds up the intensity and tone of a poem. It is mostly used in lyrical poems and songs, with the objective of using repeated lines to soften the typical [repetition](#) of traditional forms.