

Refrain, Again: The Return of the Villanelle


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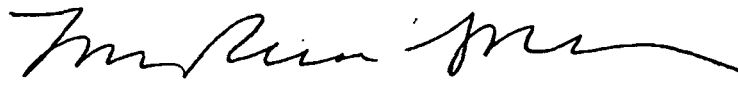
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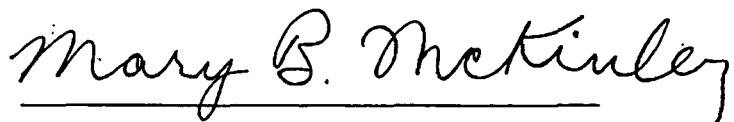
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## ABSTRACT

Poets and scholars are all wrong about the villanelle. While most reference texts teach that the villanelle's nineteen-line alternating-refrain form was codified in the Renaissance, the scholar Julie Kane has conclusively shown that Jean Passerat's "Villanelle" ("J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"), written in 1574 and first published in 1606, is the only Renaissance example of this form. My own research has discovered that the nineteenth-century "revival" of the villanelle stems from an 1844 treatise by a little-known French Romantic poet-critic named Wilhelm Ténint.

My study traces the villanelle first from its highly mythologized origin in the humanism of Renaissance France to its deployment in French post-Romantic and English Parnassian and Decadent verse, then from its bare survival in the period of high modernism to its minor revival by mid-century modernists, concluding with its prominence in the polyvocal culture wars of Anglophone poetry ever since Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" (1976). The villanelle might justly be called the *only* fixed form of contemporary invention in English; contemporary poets may be attracted to the form because it connotes tradition without bearing the burden of tradition. Poets and scholars have neither wanted nor needed to know that the villanelle is not an archaic, foreign form.

The introduction documents the current popularity of the nineteen-line fixed-form villanelle in Anglophone poetry and its absence in Francophone poetry. The first chapter focuses on Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," offering a history, collation, interpretation, and new translation of this ignored original villanelle. The second chapter describes the highly politicized aesthetic context of nineteenth-century French and

English post-Romanticism, when professional poet-critics Théodore de Banville and Edmund Gosse claimed a false history for the villanelle. The third chapter examines the low status of the French forms in the period of high modernism and the Great War, discussing works by Joyce and Pound as well as patriotic poems. The fourth chapter explores the sources of Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" and its influence on later poets, especially Elizabeth Bishop. The conclusion places the villanelle firmly within the context of contemporary professional poetry culture.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
PERMISSIONS .....	viii
INTRODUCTION .....	10
CHAPTER ONE: The Lost Turtledove .....	31
CHAPTER TWO: Young Men of Talent.....	62
CHAPTER THREE: Ardent Ways .....	109
CHAPTER FOUR: Grave Truths, Grave Men.....	149
CONCLUSION .....	185
APPENDIX I: Anthologies Examined.....	193
APPENDIX II: List of Villanelles .....	199
APPENDIX III: Historical Collation of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" .....	228
APPENDIX IV: Comparisons .....	240
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	241

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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and wrote me very fully and satisfyingly back when I wrote to her, which she certainly didn't have to do.

The English Department gave me employment as well as education for many years: first as a work-study student with office jobs, research assistantships, and graderships, then as a graduate instructor. In conjunction with the Teaching + Technology Initiative, they funded my position as Teaching with Technology Support Partner for three years. The *Rossetti Archive* and the Electronic Text Center at Alderman Library also gave me paid work marking up texts in SGML and XML. The UVa branch of the Minority Medical Education Program gave me summer work for four years teaching medical school applicants to write personal essays for their medical school applications. Every single one of these jobs did more than pay the bills; all of them were challenging and enjoyable and sometimes moving, and all of them gave me much to ponder about life and language and the relationship between them.

The Interlibrary Loan office at the University of Virginia Library labored tirelessly on my behalf. The University of Virginia Library in general amazed me with its seemingly endless resources—its stacks, its Special Collections, its diverse services, and its technological sophistication. The OCLC FirstSearch database *WorldCat* and the Eureka *RLG Union Catalog* (formerly the *RLIN Bibliographic File*) seemed omniscient. ISIResearchSoft's bibliographic software program *EndNote* organized and formatted everything for me; I can't imagine working without it.

Michelle Allen, June Griffin, Elizabeth Outka, Lisa Spiro, and Virginia Zimmerman (now all anointed Ph.D.s!) held my hand patiently through several years of a

project that I eventually chose to abandon; my memories of that project are now colored with distaste, but my memories of our dissertation group are green and gold, like spinach and garlic, and are some of the best memories of my life. Gangs of women dedicated to a professional vocation are too rare; the members of that group all know how special those meetings were. My close friends Margaret Gardiner, Danny Schmidt, Janus Raphaelidis, Jan Smith, Browning Porter, Jeff Romano, Paul Curreri, and Devon Sproule, on the other hand, might not know that they've enriched my intellectual life every bit as much as they have my social life. I appreciate and admire their talents, their ambitions, their principles, and their constancy more than I can say.

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## PERMISSIONS

Professor Phillip K. Jason granted permission to reprint his English translation of Jean Passerat's "Villanelle" ("J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"), which originally appeared in his article "Modern Versions of the Villanelle," *College Literature* 7 (1980). Robert S. Means, English and American Literature Librarian of the Brigham Young University Library granted permission to use his scanned image of "We Shall Not Sleep," *Ladies' Home Journal* 35.11 (1918 Nov): 56. The image is also available at <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~english/WWI/main/LHJ1918.html> as part of a virtual exhibit titled "Anthem for Doomed Youth: Writers and Literature of The Great War, 1914-1918."



Whenever we think of what fulfills itself  
By making use of us, we are somewhat uneasy.  
A form is accomplished, exists, though before it was not,  
And we have nothing more to do with it. Others, generations,  
Will choose what they want, accepting or destroying it.  
And instead of us, real, they will need just names.

Czeslaw Milosz, from "At Yale"<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The first villanelle I ever read *knowing* that it was a villanelle was Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art." I read it in the fall of 1998, while in graduate school at an American university at the tail end of the twentieth century, serving as a teaching assistant in a 300-student class on twentieth-century literature in English for English majors: Elizabeth Bishop served a week's sentence on the syllabus. Until that time, I had not heard of the villanelle--or if by some chance I had, it would only have been a passing mention (immediately forgotten) in connection with Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" or Theodore Roethke's "The Waking," no doubt. Even though I had always been fond of both those poems--and remembered studying the Roethke at some length in a class during my undergraduate work--I had certainly never before learned that (as these lecturers explained to these undergraduates) the villanelle was an archaic French form whose rules were strict: nineteen lines, five tercets, one quatrain, two rhymes, and two rhyming refrains alternating at fixed intervals.

Struck by Bishop's poem, I looked up the villanelle in a poetry handbook--Stephen Adams's *Poetic Designs: An Introduction to Meters, Verse Forms, and Figures of Speech* (1997). I happened to have this handbook on hand because it had been assigned as one of the chief texts in *Studies in Poetry*, a class I was to teach for the first time in the following semester. I was at that time specializing in the Victorian novel, but I had been tapped to teach *Studies in Poetry* chiefly on the strength of having written a few poems, which made me better qualified to teach the class than the other prose specialists bursting the seams of the department. Nevertheless, I was of course anxious to increase my authority in this relatively unexplored field before having to pose as an expert in it, and

the villanelle sounded like something a bit tricky that I'd need to brush up on.

That certainly served as extra incentive to look it up, even apart from the appeal "One Art" had for me.

In a chapter on "Stanza and Form," in a subsection on "The French Forms," Adams reported that the villanelle is "more frequently met with" than the triolet, and like the triolet

also features a double refrain, this time on the same rhyme: *A'ba" abA'*  
*abA" abA' abA" abA'A"*. The meter can be iambic trimeter, tetrameter, or pentameter (or, I suppose, any meter a poet can sustain). Like the triolet, this form, which was associated with pastoral in French Renaissance poetry, was also imported for light verse by minor figures like Austin Dobson. When James Joyce in his novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* wanted to demonstrate his hero's "arrival" as an artist, he had him produce a villanelle [...]. (93)

Adams goes on to quote Stephen Dedalus's villanelle in its entirety, and then mentions several other "fine examples of villanelle in the twentieth century," including "One Art," "The Waking," and "Do not go gentle into that good night" (quoting the concluding couplet of the latter). The paragraphs on the villanelle conclude with the remark that "A more recent example, Molly Peacock's 'Little Miracle,' finds formal latitude by contrasting three-beat refrain lines against metrically variable free lines, and by other licenses with the paradigm"; "Little Miracle" is then reproduced in full (94-5). And if documentary evidence should be for some reason needed to support my own claim

not to have been conscious of the villanelle before 1998, I can point to my marginal note in Adams beside the quoted concluding couplet of "Do not go gentle into that good night." The note exclaims, "Oh, that's a villanelle!"

I tell this tale of my own ignorance and enlightenment (and breathless marginalia) in the belief that it is essentially representative of a larger history of ignorance and enlightenment regarding the villanelle in the American academy. It is of course not possible to date the general villanelle illumination as precisely as my own individual villanelle illumination, but the one may be said to have taken place only about ten or a dozen years before the other—in the late nineteen-eighties. Most of those involved with contemporary American poetry are aware that there has been a recent surge of interest in the villanelle. This, very likely, is largely due (like my own surge of interest) to Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art." Bishop's poem was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1976 and also appeared that same year in her influential collection *Geography III*. Given a few years to germinate, it became a popular anthology piece, appearing in *Contemporary American Poetry* in both 1985 and 1996, in the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* in both 1988 and 2003, and the *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* in 2000.

But the mild success of the villanelle in the poetic establishment is also, no doubt, due to the stirrings of New Formalism. New Formalism (later called by some Expansive Poetry or New Expansive Poetry) began in the mid-nineteen-eighties with a series of combative articles in *Salmagundi* and *Critical Inquiry*, with Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate: A Novel in Verse* (1986), and with Philip Dacey and David Jauss's anthology *Strong Measures: Contemporary American Poetry in Traditional Forms* (1986). Such

New Formalist works most often tended to call not only for a return to formal versification, but a return to a more *popular* kind of poetry, one that would be read by a general, literate audience. Debate on New Formalism has continued since, and other New Formalist anthologies and works of critical discussion have appeared in the last fifteen years or so, consolidating the movement.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence supports the contention that the villanelle seeped into the mainstream of poetry after the advent of New Formalism; editions of major anthologies register a slight but certain increase in the importance of the villanelle in the late nineteen-eighties. The *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* of 1973 includes four villanelles, while the 1988 edition increases that number to nine; the 1978 edition of the *Penguin Book of English Verse* includes one villanelle, while the *New Penguin Book of English Verse* of 2000 includes four; the 1985 edition of Houghton-Mifflin's *Contemporary American Poetry* includes three villanelles, while the 1996 edition includes five.<sup>3</sup> The four editions of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* show a small but steady increase in the number of villanelles, with one in the 1970 edition, two in the 1975 edition, three in the 1983 edition, and five in the 1996 edition. Even the ten years between the publication of two anthologies "celebrating the anniversary of the American Academy of Poets" made a difference, since the 1996 *Sixty Years of American Poetry* includes Carolyn Kizer's villanelle "On a Line from Valéry," while in 1986 there had been no villanelles in *Fifty Years of American Poetry*.

The villanelle was, of course, also a strong presence in the anthologies specifically devoted to traditional form that began to appear in the same period. Dacey

and Jauss's *Strong Measures* (1986) collected a wide-ranging sample of post-World War Two poetry, representing one hundred and eighty-seven poets in an anthology that included about three hundred poems. Thirteen of these poems are villanelles—a number that compares respectably to the fifteen sestinas also included, though it does not approach the fifty-plus sonnets of various kinds. David Lehman's *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms* (1987 and 1996) includes six villanelles, as does Annie Finch's *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women* (1994), while Mark Jarman and David Mason's more exclusive *Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism* (1996) includes four.

But perhaps the most quickly telling evidence for the new importance of the villanelle is a comparison of the entries under that head in different editions of that first and last resort for most prosodical, historical, or biographical poetic inquiries: Princeton's *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. The unsigned two-paragraph entry in the 1965 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* is reproduced unaltered in the 1974 edition, newly titled the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*; the entry devotes most space to describing the villanelle schematic, and then briefly cites only five poets in four centuries who have essayed the villanelle in English *or* in French. Even as late as 1986, the more than twenty-year-old entry remained unrevised; it was reprinted again that year in the *Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, a shorter version of the *Encyclopedia*. In 1993, however, the entry for the villanelle in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* was greatly expanded (to four lengthy paragraphs). The revised entry signals the new importance of the villanelle, noting that "Surprisingly, perhaps, the

fortunes of the villanelle have prospered in the 20th century" and mentioning that Auden, Thomas, Fuller, Empson, Roethke, Plath, Pound, Merrill, and Hugo have all written villanelles.

The anthologized villanelles by major poets, of course, represent only the sunlit tip of the iceberg—the iceberg being the many villanelles that have appeared in little magazines, poets' own books, and poetry workshops in the United States and the United Kingdom. I have compiled a list of villanelles indicating that over a hundred villanelles have been published in reputable literary journals and books since 1985, and I am not so simple as to suppose that this constitutes the entirety even of *published* villanelles from that period.<sup>4</sup> *Unpublished* villanelles and villanelles in M.F.A. theses are, I would venture, far from rare.<sup>5</sup>

As for the contemporary villanelle in French, it is not to be found: not in Claude Roy and Michel Décaudin's *Anthologie De La Poésie Française Du XXe Siècle* (2000); not in Alain Bosquet's *Anthologie De La Poésie Française Contemporaine: Les Trente Dernières Années* (1994), not in Henri Deluy's *Poésie En France, 1983-1988: Une Anthologie Critique* (1989). Negative evidence is of course too easily come by, but it does seem to be the case that the twentieth-century French villanelle is conspicuously absent—it is certainly nowhere near as thriving as it is in English. Dr. Michael Bishop of the University of Dalhousie, a respected and prolific scholar of contemporary French poetry, is at best dubious as to the whereabouts of *any* contemporary Francophone villanelle: "Well, I cannot say that I am aware of specific exploitation of the villanelle," he wrote to me, "but that may mean that in certain works I just was not thinking about

such possibilities" (personal e-mail, 10 April 2003).<sup>6</sup> No professor of Anglophone poetry would need to make such a modest reply, being undoubtedly already aware of at least a few of the scores of villanelles enumerated above.

My own initial interest in the villanelle had two prompt consequences. The first, as I have described above, was that I looked it up, and thereby gained whatever benefits were to be gained by some slight increase of knowledge. Certainly it was the kind of knowledge that seemed as though it would help to consolidate my tentative literary authority. The second consequence—and few will probably be surprised to hear this—was that I wrote a villanelle of my own. I modeled it very consciously on "One Art," attempting to mimic especially that poem's additive quality, its array of seemingly neutral evidence supporting an initial proposition that then culminates in a more personal revelation.<sup>7</sup>

What I would argue is that these two consequences are again representative, far more so than I would have thought at the time, when I imagined myself to be learning just enough about the villanelle to get by. I never doubted that more mature and imposing scholars knew more about the villanelle than I did. And, when I deferentially took "One Art" for my model, I never doubted that more dedicated and brilliant poets (such as Bishop herself) were bolder innovators than I, interested in transformation rather than imitation.

It is in fact the case that the vast majority of poetry scholars know only as much about the villanelle as is to be found in handbooks such as Adams's *Poetic Designs*—and the handbooks are all wrong.



Handbooks and anthologies and scholarly surveys—reference texts of any kind—that mention the villanelle almost unanimously assert or strongly imply that the villanelle has nineteen lines and an alternating refrain on the scheme A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A", and that this scheme was fixed centuries ago in France through then-common practice, though it is now a rarity. Here is a sobering truth: only a single poet of the Renaissance wrote a villanelle by that definition, and he wrote only one. Jean Passerat's "Villanelle," also called "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" (probably written in 1574), has come to represent a nonexistent tradition of which it is the sole example.

The villanelle's origin is in sixteenth-century France: that is technically accurate, since Passerat's poem is organized according to the scheme commonly cited as the defining characteristic of the villanelle. But recent scholarship has conclusively shown that it was at that time a *nonce* form, and it remained so for many generations. There is simply no significant villanelle tradition in French. The villanelle form has belonged almost entirely to English, and its history in that language dates back only to the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the villanelle has never been so common in any time as it is now. The villanelle was rare even among the British versifiers of more than a century ago who fostered its "revival," and it was never attempted by any major poet of that age.

Two substantial scholarly treatises on the history of the villanelle are in existence: Ronald E. McFarland's *The Villanelle: The Evolution of a Poetic Form* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1987) and Julie Ellen Kane's unpublished dissertation, "How the Villanelle's Form Got Fixed" (Louisiana State University, 1999).<sup>8</sup> The latter

dramatically revises the former in some important respects. Together they provide a detailed history of the villanelle that contradicts almost all the briefer accounts.

McFarland's book, as it happens, is the cited source on the villanelle in *Poetic Designs*, the reference I consulted at the commencement of my own interest in the form. *The Villanelle* attempts three things: to locate instances of the villanelle, to rank the intrinsic worth of these instances, and to narrate a consistent history of the villanelle. The first goal is fulfilled by one appendix listing sixty-seven villanelles in Spanish, Italian, French, and English dating as far back as the fifteenth century and a second appendix reprinting the full text of thirty-three additional contemporary villanelles in English.<sup>9</sup> Throughout, evaluation is predicated on the opposition of terms such as "sophisticated" and "trivial"; "serious" and "light"; and "experimental" and "conventional"; with the former terms positive and the second terms negative. It is primarily a poem's content, or subject matter, that is subjected to this evaluation, but also such formal attributes as enjambment and alteration of the refrain. For instance, of Edmund Gosse's "Wouldst thou not be content to die" (1878), McFarland opines that

for the most part the poem is conventional in sentiment and essentially descriptive or pictorial in mode. Despite the implied presence of another person, no genuine dramatic moment occurs in the poem, nor is there any inner tension on the part of the speaker. Certain elements of Gosse's art, however, should be credited. Unlike some of his followers, he does allow some variation in the refrain lines, and he moves fairly naturally from the second line of each stanza (without excessively pronounced end

punctuation) to the refrain line; the penultimate tercet moves easily into the concluding stanza. (64-5)

Evaluations such as these constitute the majority of the book.

McFarland's literary-historical narrative is also essentially an evaluation, but an evaluation of the villanelle as a form. He argues that the villanelle has become a versatile form in the hands of good modern poets, one that is capable of expressing the deepest philosophies and emotions:

The villanelle has [...] escaped the nearly automatic triviality of its early application in English and in many French poems. Trivial poets will always exist, though, and they will turn to the villanelle on occasion. The form does lend itself to sometimes delightful comic uses. If nothing else, I hope this study proves its flexibility, even when the poems are composed according to the strictest rules.

McFarland observes that what he calls the "loose-lined" villanelle (characterized by enjambment and varied refrains) has come to be increasingly common, and this seems coextensive with the introduction of more "profound" themes than those explored by the sixteenth-century and nineteenth-century practitioners of the form:

By the end of the 1950's [...], the villanelle had been proven, at least in the hands of able poets, capable of the profoundest themes, and of tones ranging from the comic to the apocalyptic, from the meditative to the enraged. Most important, however, were the achievements with the form by poets of major stature, from Pound and Auden to Thomas and Roethke.

Among these poets some rather cautious experimentation with the form set the groundwork for poets of the next generation, who were to examine rigorously its potential and its limits. (96)

By this account, modern poets surpassed their Victorian (and Renaissance) predecessors in thematic exploitation of the villanelle, while contemporary poets have surpassed their modern predecessors in formal experimentation with the villanelle.

McFarland is chiefly interested in this aesthetic "evolution" of the villanelle as it has played out in the twentieth century, but he does include two chapters on the villanelle's origins in sixteenth century France and fifteenth century Italy, and he in fact sees this as one of the distinctive contributions of his work:

Very few writers of the villanelle in English are aware of its complete history any more than I was when I began research into the subject. Many poets have been influenced only by direct predecessors who have written villanelles in English. Some have been aware of French antecedents, usually limited to Jean Passerat. Few, however, have known of its Italian origins. While the primary intent of this book is to examine the development of achievements in the form by English and American poets, I have devoted almost half of it to the history of the villanelle in Italian and French poetry. (x)

It is this early history of the villanelle that Kane's dissertation focuses on, and this early history it radically alters. While Kane does correct McFarland on some factual assertions,

it is primarily his smooth narrative of gradual development ("evolution") that her work interrogates and disrupts.

Kane reports that she can find only eighteen examples of poems designated as "*Villanelle*" or "*Villanesque*" written in France between 1553 and 1627, and reveals that no two of the eighteen are identical in rhyme scheme, length, and syllable count. They do not resemble each other but, in most cases, each resembles an actual musical *villanella* or *villancico*. It cannot possibly be said that there was anything resembling a poetic "form," let alone a fixed poetic form, for the villanelle in the sixteenth century (155).

The *villanella* and the *villancico* were at that time Italian and Spanish dance-song forms, musically simpler than the polyphonic madrigal. French poets adopting the title "*Villanelle*" or "*Villanesque*" thus probably meant to indicate that their poems, if set to music (as was commonly done), should have simple rather than complex settings; the simplicity of musical setting usually suggested a "simplicity" of character or theme, too, best evoked by terms such as "pastoral" or "rustic." Kane explains that sixteenth-century poets in England used the term "Neapolitan" or "Napolitane" (and, later, the term "canzonetta") rather than the term "*villanella*," but that although the terms were different, "In both countries it was strongly associated with music and with an 'old-fashioned' oral poetic tradition of semi-improvising lyrics to a preexisting tune" (202). In other words, to title a poem "*Villanelle*" would have been something akin to titling a poem "Blues" today. Structurally, the *villanella* had no rule other than that it usually had a refrain, which was--as in the popular song forms of any era--a single refrain, not an alternating one. The terms

"*villanella*" and "*villanelle*" referred to *musical* distinctions, not *verbal* distinctions; they were by no means set poetic forms, as the sonnet then was, and even as the triolet and the rondeau were.

McFarland's first two chapters, then, on the early history of the *villanella* and the *villancico*, are shown to be more irrelevant than inaccurate—though also inaccurate, as for instance on the date of composition of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," which Kane corrects from "ca. 1590" to 1574. McFarland's first two chapters, in fact, continually mention the fact that the *villanella* was associated with music and that neither it nor any sixteenth-century French *villanelle* had a fixed form, but without seeming to recognize that this makes nonsense of his narrative of steady development from that age to this. Being in fact more interested in evaluation than in evolution, despite its title, McFarland's work misses the point that in modern usage, the term "*villanelle*" *means* a poem modeled after the scheme A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A". His work *The Villanelle* is based on an equivocation, since the first two chapters are accounts of "the villanelle" in a different sense—roughly and briefly, the sense of "peasant song." Even my dictionary defines the word "*villanella*" as meaning "a rustic Italian part song," whereas the separate word "*villanelle*" is in prosody "a short poem of fixed form, written in tercets" etcetera.<sup>10</sup>

The only poem of the Renaissance on the now-familiar scheme A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A" was Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," first published in 1606. Kane's research, methodologically committed to the systematic examination of primary sources, shows that the scheme of this poem was only "fixed" as a schematic

type in the nineteenth century. She reports that in 1845, Théodore de Banville published a parodic poem on the model of Passerat's "Villanelle," titled "Villanelle de Buloz," in the Parisian periodical *Silhouette*. "Villanelle de Buloz" was reprinted in the *Journal d'Alençon* in February of 1857 and also appeared later that year in the book for which Banville is best known, his *Odes Funambulesques*. When Théodore de Banville's *Petit traité de poésie française* came out in 1872, it defined the villanelle as a type of fixed form:

La Villanelle est divisée en tercets. Elle commence par une vers féminin.

Il ne paraît pas qu'elle comporte un nombre fixe de tercets.

Elle est écrite sur deux rimes: l'une, masculine, qui régit le second vers de tous les tercets; l'autre, féminine, qui régit les autres vers. [...] Et rien n'est plus chatoyant que ce petit poème. On dirait une tresse formée de fils argent et d'or, que traverse un troisième fil, couleur de rose! (214-5)

The Villanelle is divided into tercets. It begins with a feminine line.

It does not appear to consist of a fixed number of tercets.

It is written on two rhymes: one masculine, which governs the second line of all the tercets; the other feminine, which governs the other lines. [...] And nothing is more sparkling than this little form. One might say that it is a plait woven from strands of silver and gold, through which winds a third strand the color of a rose!<sup>11</sup>

The 1751 edition of Richelet's *Dictionnaire de rimes* also contributed to later confusion,<sup>12</sup> but in Kane's work it is primarily Banville who is credited with creating the legend of the schematic villanelle out of whole cloth—though even his scheme differs in several respects from that usually cited by handbooks today, since Banville declared that the entire poem could be of any length and that the refrains should have feminine endings, stipulations that have disappeared from English definitions. The nineteen-line model was solidified in the public imagination by one Joseph Boulmier, who published in Paris in 1878 an entire book of schematic nineteen-line villanelles explicitly modeled upon Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle." Banville's *Petit traité* was read with interest and admiration by Edmund Gosse and Austin Dobson, who went on to write schematic villanelles of their own and to champion the form in England as one that ought to be "revived." It is not too much to say that instead they manufactured the form as a type.

From that point on, Kane and McFarland and other scholars are in essential agreement on the basic history of the villanelle, from its popularity at the end of the nineteenth century with a coterie of *vers de société* poets (including Gosse, Dobson, W. E. Henley, Andrew Lang, Ernest Dowson, and Oscar Wilde) to its featuring prominently in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; from its successful remaking by Dylan Thomas and Theodore Roethke at mid-century to its current firm standing in contemporary English poetry. But contemporary handbooks, guides, manuals, primers, introductions to poetry in English have frequently reproduced each others' inaccuracies and assumptions about the early history of the villanelle.



These works often make two broad claims that Kane's work definitively disproves: that the villanelle is essentially French, and that it was schematized in Italy or France at some vague period during or before the Renaissance, by Passerat or by one of his predecessors or contemporaries. Mary Oliver's *Rules for the Dance* (1998) calls the villanelle "originally and still a French form [...] usually, but not always, in iambic pentameter" (53). Stephen Adams's *Poetic Designs* (1997), as we've seen, reports that "The meter can be iambic trimeter, tetrameter, or pentameter (or, I suppose, any meter a poet can sustain). Like the triolet, this form [...] was associated with pastoral in French Renaissance poetry" (93). Dacey and Jauss's New Formalist anthology *Strong Measures* (1986) states in an appendix with definitions of forms that the villanelle is "A French syllabic form. [...] The lines may be of any single length" (449). Judson Jerome's *The Poet's Handbook* (1980) explains that "French and Italian poetry produced many fixed forms, often with complex rhyme schemes which are difficult to adapt to English because rhymes in our language are so much more scarce. [...] Many villanelles are in tetrameter" (129). Both the 1974 and 1965 editions of the *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* published by Princeton inform the reader that the villanelle is "A Fr. verse form, derived from an It. folk song of the late 15th- early 17th c." and that it "has since Passerat retained the following pattern [...]" (893, 893).

The confusion about the villanelle's meter exhibited in these examples is only one indicator that the form's history has never been well and thoroughly understood by Anglophone poets and scholars. The confusion can also be attributed to the fact that the villanelle, like the majority of French poetry, has never been associated with a particular

meter. In fact, it is almost contradictory to speak of a form as both metrical and French, since almost all French poetry is essentially syllabic, making the distinction irrelevant.<sup>13</sup> Dacey and Jauss get closest to the truth, albeit a bit tautologically, when they label the villanelle "A French syllabic form." Villanelles in English, of course, are free to be accentual-syllabic if they like, though equally of course they can also be accentual or non-metrical.<sup>14</sup> Judson Jerome might have been thinking of nineteenth-century villanelles such as W. E. Henley's "A dainty thing's the villanelle" and Oscar Wilde's "Theocritus" when he made the assertion that "Many villanelles are in tetrameter" while Mary Oliver might have been thinking of twentieth-century villanelles such as "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "The Waking" when she maintained that villanelles are "usually [...] in iambic pentameter." Meter is a major part of the definition of most English poetic forms, and these forms tend to be accentual-syllabic—indeed, the term "meter" is sometimes informally used as a synonym for accentual-syllabism. It is clear, at any rate, that the habit of associating poetic form with meter is widespread among English-speaking scholars, and that this habit has in the case of the villanelle led to error and inconsistency.

There are handbooks and guides that go into more accurate detail, however, and there are some that refrain from going into inaccurate detail, preferring to give the alphabetic rhyme scheme of villanelle almost without embellishment. The entry in the 1965 and 1974 editions of the Princeton *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetic Forms* wisely makes no mention of meter, for instance. The 1993 *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* quietly points out that the villanelle "first had as its only

distinguishing features a pastoral subject and use of refrain; in other respects it was without rule." The entry goes on to assign primary responsibility for the fixed nineteen-line villanelle to the English, not the French:

While the French poets who revived the villanelle in the later 19th century treated it as a stanza type, their English counterparts, however, invested it with the status of a fixed form. Although Austin Dobson tried to present the villanelle to the English as he found it in Banville, declaring "there is no restriction as to the number of stanzas," his compatriots stuck rigidly to the 19-line Passerat model popularized by Joseph Boulmier. (1358; abbreviations expanded)

This entry was written by Clive Scott, then lecturer in French and now Professor of European Literature at the University of East Anglia; it is telling that a more accurate account of the villanelle comes from a lecturer in French than from a scholar of Anglophone poetry.<sup>15</sup>

Many contemporary American poets have written villanelles believing--or perhaps a more accurate word is *feeling*--that in doing so they are rebelling against a tradition by altering it according to contemporary norms. Cheryl Clarke, for instance, author of the villanelle "What goes around comes around, or The proof is in the pudding," a piece anthologized in Annie Finch's 1994 *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women*, introduces her poems in that volume by describing some of her motives for writing in traditional forms, often in ways that are troped as untraditional: "I do it to be rebellious and sometimes to be reserved. How can I reflect my

black self in the form, how can I speak my contempt from inside the master's formula?" (48). The object of that rebelliousness and that contempt, however, is in the case of the villanelle decidedly unclear. Who has codified the formula? Who is the master? What if we ourselves are the masters?

What is clear is that is that the idea of the villanelle's foreign and archaic essence has been more important than its really rather mundane, even sordidly familiar story; the schematic villanelle is the creation of poets and scholars invested in politicized aesthetic debates and anxious to consolidate their literary reputations. These poets and scholars have continually invoked and never narrated the history of the villanelle; my first task in this project will therefore be to tell that history of the schematic villanelle as fully as possible. My second task will be to show exactly how little that full history has mattered to contemporary poets and scholars of poetry, and my third task will be to argue that this ignorance has been entirely justified and even necessary. It would hardly be worthwhile to demand that poets and scholars should cease to debate and worry and romanticize and prescribe, in any case, and while I do want to help set the record straight as to the true history of the villanelle, it seems to me to have been a fortunate accident that the record has heretofore been crooked.

Many superb villanelles have been written in English in the twentieth century, and I think that this is largely *because* the true history of the villanelle has not been fully known. To my mind, the villanelle has become recently popular at least partly because it has connoted tradition without bearing the burden of one. Contemporary poets might gesture toward a tradition (sometimes with rude gestures, at that), but they have insisted

stridently that the tradition is foreign—that, in fact, the very concept of a tradition is foreign to American poetry. The villanelle has the cachet of an elitist form but the shape and rhythm of a popular or folk form, and there are not yet so many brilliant examples of it that originality seems impossible; it has therefore become one of the forms of choice in a poetic culture that is schizophrenically split between a devotion to defiant originality and a desire for the kind of eminence that an antique European fixed form can grant.

Stephen Cushman has held that the defining characteristic of American poetry may well be anxiety about its own form:

American poetry without convulsiveness would not be American poetry. To wish for a more tranquil tradition, one in which factions have settled their differences or a particular faction has displaced all others, is to wish American poetry out of existence. But my larger point is that nothing has convulsed, and continues to convulse, American poetry as violently as arguments about poetic form. (187)

The case of the villanelle is striking evidence for Cushman's thesis, since the villanelle seems to have become a vital and valuable contemporary American form chiefly because it simultaneously provokes and soothes our anxieties about traditional European forms. To write a villanelle in contemporary America is to scratch at the itch for formalism--and as any mother will tell you, scratching only makes it worse. Wishing for a more tranquil tradition may be to wish American poetry out of existence, but that wish is as American as the poetry itself; therefore, what I wish is that we could have the poetry without the

anxiety; what I wish is that all poems were always the first of their kind, pioneering—and in this, I am merely typical of American poetry culture. What I sadly know, however, and what I think American poetry culture ought to grant, is that we are often policemen, not pioneers; when it comes to poetic form, all of us prescribe and punish more than we would like to admit.

This project too is embodied, of course, in a particular form. I have chosen to conduct this literary history largely on a case-study method, concentrating chiefly on the transmission and reception of particularly influential villanelles. The introduction documents the current popularity of the nineteen-line fixed-form villanelle in Anglophone poetry and its absence in Francophone poetry. The first chapter focuses on Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," offering a history, collation, interpretation, and new translation of this ignored original villanelle. The second chapter describes the highly politicized aesthetic context of nineteenth-century French and English post-Romanticism, when professional poet-critics Théodore de Banville and Edmund Gosse claimed a false history for the villanelle. The third chapter examines the low status of the French forms in the period of high modernism and the Great War, discussing works by Joyce and Pound as well as patriotic poems. The fourth chapter focuses on Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night," tracing especially the influence of William Empson. The conclusion places the villanelle firmly within the context of contemporary transatlantic professional poetry culture.

## CHAPTER ONE: The Lost Turtledove

In the introduction I documented the recent resurgence of the nineteen-line villanelle, a resurgence that has no doubt already been noted in a general way by those steeped in contemporary Anglophone poetry. One need only pick up a new anthology by a former U.S. Poet Laureate to verify this resurgence, since Billy Collins's 2003 anthology *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry* includes two nineteen-line villanelles: Mary Jo Salter's "Video Blues" and Steve Kowit's "Grammar Lesson." I also pointed out that very recent scholarship by Julie Kane has conclusively shown that the nineteen-line villanelle was only a nonce form in sixteenth-century France, a finding that directly contradicts the assertion of most twentieth-century poetry handbooks that the nineteen-line villanelle (schematized as A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A") was at that time a traditional fixed poetic form.

In this chapter, I turn from the tasks of establishing what is already known and publicizing what will soon be better known to another task: narrating the largely *unknown* early history of the contemporary villanelle. Jean Passerat's 1574 "Villanelle" ("J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle") is the first nineteen-line villanelle, and it was the *only* nineteen-line villanelle for two and a half centuries; the history of "the villanelle" in the Renaissance that I offer here is therefore simply a history of this poem.<sup>16</sup> Kane has already done a thorough job of demonstrating that "*villanella*" was a primarily musical term and of establishing that the other poems titled "Villanelle" or "Villanesque" in the Renaissance (of which there were very few: seventeen, to be precise) were formally unfixed, and therefore this ground need not be covered again. My task is primarily to challenge romantic and/or incomplete contemporary accounts of the villanelle's history.

Little attention has been paid to Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" in the twentieth century, which is in itself significant: as I argue throughout this work, the resurgence of the "French Renaissance" villanelle form in contemporary Anglophone poetry would probably not have taken place if our misty notions of its origins had ever been dispelled. The villanelle has been made to represent a sweeter long-ago that never existed.

The current perception of the early history of the villanelle can be represented by a twentieth-century work that *does* mention Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle": Mark Strand and Eavan Boland's *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (2000). This work is not specifically associated with New Formalism, and the account of the villanelle to be found in it is longer than those commonly found in poetry handbooks and dictionaries. We might therefore expect *The Making of a Poem* to be both authoritative and mainstream, even though (or especially since) its intended audience is clearly of the undergraduate persuasion. It is therefore worth quoting Strand and Boland's "History of the Form" at some length, almost in full.

It hardly seems likely that a form so sparkling and complicated as the villanelle could have had its origin in an Italian harvest field. In fact it came from an Italian rustic song, the term itself *villanella* thought to derive from *villano*, an Italian word for "peasant," or even *villa* the Latin word for "country house" or "farm."

If it was a round song--something sung with repetitive words and refrains--it may have taken its first, long-lost shape as an accompaniment to the different stages of an agricultural task. Binding sheaves, perhaps, or even scything. No actual trace of this early origin remains. By the time the villanelle emerges into poetic history, it does so as a French poem with pastoral themes.

The form we know today began with the work of a French poet called Jean Passerat. He was a popular, politically engaged writer in



sixteenth-century France. When he died in 1602, he left behind him several poems that had entered popular affection and memory.

One of these was his villanelle about a lost turtledove: a disguised love song. Even through a fraction of Passerat's poems [sic] on his lost turtledove, the twentieth-century villanelle can be seen clearly:

*J'ai perdu my [sic] tourterelle:  
Est-ce point celle que j'oy?  
Je veux aller après elle.  
Tu regretes ta femelle?  
Helas! aussi fais-je moy:  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.*

With the publication of this villanelle and because of its immediate popularity--amounting almost to popular-song status in its day--the form defined itself through contact with an audience: a striking but not uncommon way for poetic form to find itself.

This poem established the pattern for all future villanelles, both in French and English. The actual structure is as follows. [...] In the 1870s in England, French poetry became an object of interest and admiration. Swinburne, for instance, wrote an elegy for Baudelaire. This was followed by an interest in the forms of French verse and several poets of the time, including Henley and Oscar Wilde, took it up. (6-7)

This account is inaccurate in several important respects. The first minor point to make is that the Italian *villanella* was not an authentic folk song. It was a courtly song that may or may not have been popular among the *bourgeoisie*; it was certainly not grown in Italian fields among the peasantry. Ronald McFarland discusses this issue in depth in the first chapter of *The Villanelle: The Evolution of a Poetic Form*. He writes, for instance, that the *villanella* "assume[s] a popular tone for the most part, as Galanti has indicated, but usually with a certain affectation of *concetti*, refinement of sentiment, and preciseness of phrasing and versification" (2), and concludes that "It is best then to consider the Italian villanella of the sixteenth century not semipopular, but quasipopular, the product, for the most part, of conscious imitation of a popular source" (24-5). In other words, the composer of a *villanella* invoked the simple, the rustic, the romantic for an artistic effect,

just as Cambridge-educated Christopher Marlowe did in the poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599/1600).

A second and more important point to make is that the influential nineteen-line scheme of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" has in any case almost nothing to do with the *villanella*, so that the question of whether the *villanella* was a folk song or a courtly song is essentially irrelevant.<sup>17</sup> Structurally, the *villanella* was marked by nothing more idiosyncratic than a refrain, an "idiosyncrasy" it shared (and shares) with the folk ballad, the blues, the ghazal, and any number of sung or chanted forms from every era and country. Passerat's French title "Villanelle" alluded not to the form of the Italian *villanella*, but to its themes: simplicity, agrarian landscape, embodied rather than intellectualized emotion. This type of pastoral poem or song also became fashionable in England during the Renaissance under the name "Neapolitan" or "*Napolitane*" (the *villanella* was associated with Naples), and this too was a thematic and musical designation rather than a formal or structural one. The title of Passerat's poem probably also indicated that the poem could be set to *villanella* music, although so far as we know this was never done. But to claim that the nineteen-line alternating-refrain form in tercets that we know today as the villanelle "had its origin in" or "evolved from" the *villanella* is akin to claiming that the poetic form of Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" had its origin in or evolved from the music of Strauss.<sup>18</sup>

There is a clear nostalgia in Strand and Boland's entry, a longing for a golden age when poetry was truly popular (the word recurs four times in the brief passage), not marginalized and professionalized as everyone knows it is today. There are two senses of

the word "popular" at work here: the sense of "much-loved" and the sense of "of the people." Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was not popular in either sense in its own day. It was a rather obscure lyric written by a rather obscure poet who inhabited a professionalized and privileged literary culture that in some ways was very much like our own professionalized and privileged literary culture. "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was written for a king, and may have been distributed in manuscript in courtly circles, but there is little if any reason to suppose that the poem was admired even by that august and limited company, let alone by the general populace.

### **Background of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"**

Jean Passerat (1534-1602) was best known in his own time as a classicist and a humanist, and was a well-established professional public intellectual in 1574, when "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was written.<sup>19</sup> Passerat was born in the provincial city of Troyes, which is situated about a hundred miles east of Paris. He studied Latin and classical philology in Paris in his early twenties and was appointed to a lectureship at the Collège du Plessis in Paris in 1558, winning a series of increasingly prestigious positions at Parisian colleges in the years that followed as his fame as an orator spread. In 1564 Passerat was so well-regarded that he was appointed to organize all the celebrations for the historic royal visit of King Charles IX to Troyes; Passerat's biographer Roger Patterson writes that "The choice of Passerat for this position of responsibility emphasises not only his importance as *the* leading literary figure from Troyes, but also gives some indication of his prominence at Court in Paris" (115). Passerat then went to

Bourges to earn a law degree (so as to better understand and teach Cicero), a task which occupied him from 1564 to 1567. In 1568, after a trip to Italy, Passerat resumed his post at the highly-esteemed Collège du Cardinal Lemoine in Paris. The culmination of Passerat's career came when he was thirty-eight; in 1572, he was appointed to the Chair of Latin Eloquence at the Collège Royal in Paris. His predecessor, the famous Protestant scholar Peter Ramus, had been killed that year in the bloody St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, in which more than two thousand Protestants died. Passerat (a relatively moderate Catholic) held this prestigious academic position for the rest of his life. He never married, and his works were edited and published posthumously by his nephew, Jean de Rougevalet.

Probably three-quarters of the works by Passerat printed during his life or shortly thereafter are in Latin, and his primary identity was that of a Latin orator and philologist. Passerat's biographer and bibliographer Roger Patterson writes that "the single work by which Passerat wished to be remembered was (as his personal friend, [Jacques] Gillot, confided to [Joseph] Scaliger, his unique study of the morphological developments in the Latin language, posthumously published as *De Literarum inter se cognatione ac permutatione Liber* in 1606" (5). Patterson argues persuasively that the lessening importance of Latin language and literature since the Renaissance has led to the misrepresentation of Passerat as a minor French poet, when in fact he was "generally considered to have been one of the most illustrious names in late sixteenth-century French humanism" (4). And to be a humanist was to be vital:

Like all French scholars of this period, which was characterized by a vigorous pursuit of classical learning, Passerat's entire career was devoted to rediscovering, annotating, emending, and restoring the original purity of thought and language to Latin and Greek texts corrupted by centuries of neglect. Seen as the renewal of letters (or *restitutio bonarum litterarum*, to borrow the humanist phrase), the French Renaissance produced men of unbounded enthusiasm, and with almost encyclopaedic interests, who considered it their solemn duty to diffuse the wisdom of Athens and Rome gleaned from years of study. To this end, the humanists played a highly active role in society (as opposed to the contemplative life of Mediaeval scholar-monks) and the careers they engaged in were manifold: grammarian, historian, lawyer, linguist, philologist, geographer, printer-publisher, poet, architect, numismatist, diplomat, antiquarian, lecturer, professional speech-writer, playwright, propagandist-- [...]

Passerat was an archetypal humanist. (2)

In other words, a humanist was a professional public intellectual, and "Passerat was an archetypal humanist."

Original compositions in Latin such as Passerat's paradoxical encomium *Nihil* ("Nothing")--a satirical piece that according to Roger Patterson "was at one time his most frequently printed work"--were far more characteristic of Passerat's whole body of work than the pastoral love lyric "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," and it was for that body of work that he was known in his own day (33). Passerat did move in the same circles as more

important French lyricists; by far the best-known vernacular French poet of the late sixteenth century (now, as then) was Pierre de Ronsard, who was the most important member of the important group of poets called *La Pléiade* ("The Pleiades"). Ronsard called for a greater sophistication in French poetry, and his methods of achieving this goal included high diction and tone, the coining of new French words, and the frequent use of classical imitation and allusion.<sup>20</sup> Passerat and Ronsard were acquainted--were even friends--and there has been some debate over whether Passerat can be considered a minor member of the Pléiade.

Yet Passerat's vernacular poetry tended to be simpler than that of the Pléiade, and when he attempted to follow the precepts of that school (he attempted to write *vers mesurés* at one point--the French equivalent of quantitative verse) the results were usually not as admired as his other work. Passerat was also one of the anonymous contributors to another highly non-Pléiadean satire, this one in French: the 1593/4 *Satyre Ménippée de la vertu du Catholicon d'Espagne, et de la tenue des Estatz de Paris* ("Menippean Satire on the Properties of Spanish 'Catholicone,' and on the Session of the Estates General of Paris"). Historians and literary historians of the French Renaissance generally mention Passerat, if at all, in the context of the *Satyre Ménippée*; it was a literarily and historically important work from the beginning. *Nihil* earned early translation into French, and both it and the *Satyre Ménippée* produced English imitations and translations during and shortly after Passerat's lifetime.<sup>21</sup> "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," by contrast, was not translated into English until 1906--exactly three hundred years after its first publication.

"J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was part of a longer memorial sequence, *Le tombeau de Fleurie pour Niré* ("The Tombstone of Fleurie for Niré"), which was first printed four years after Passerat's death, in the 1606 *Recueil des oeuvres poétiques de Ian Passerat augmenté de plus de la moitié, outre les précédentes impressions* ("Collection of the Poetic Works of Jean Passerat, Augmented by More than Half, from Previous Editions"). An initial volume of Passerat's work, *Le premier liure des poemes de Jean Passerat* ("The First Book of the Poems of Jean Passerat") had been published in 1602, the year of the scholar's death, but this volume had not included *Le tombeau de Fleurie pour Niré*, further suggesting that the sequence was not among the most popular of Passerat's works. The music publishers Ballard and Le Roy did include one piece by Passerat in their 1578 *Second livre d'airs, chansons, villanelles napolitaines et espagnolles mis en musique à quatre parties* ("Second Book of Airs, Songs, Neapolitan Villanelles and Spanish Songs Set to Four-Part Music"), but this was not "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," nor was it even a *villanelle napolitaine*; it was, like many of Passerat's lyrics, a sonnet.<sup>22</sup>

Kane gives a clear and valuable summary of the slightly complicated issues surrounding the dating of *Le tombeau de Fleurie pour Niré* and the circumstances of its composition. She writes that the sequence was

produced by Passerat to commemorate the death of the king's beloved mistress. The title of the entire sequence is "Le tombeau de Fleurie pour Niré" ("The Monument for Fleurie by Niré")--"Fleurie" being the pet name for the mistress, and "Niré" being the pseudonym for the king. It

was long believed, based on an editorial note by Prosper Blanchemain in the 1880 edition of Passerat's *Poésies françaises*, that the sequence was written for King Henri IV upon the death of Gabrielle d'Estrées in 1599. The error was perpetuated by Edgar von Mojsisovics, who wrote a 1907 German-language thesis on Passerat, and it was picked up by [Ronald] McFarland.[...] Quite aside from the fact that Passerat was both blind and gravely ill in 1599, and could not possibly have produced the *Tombeau* in his physical condition, Roger Sorg published an article in 1925 which pointed out that Passerat's sequence bears many striking parallels to the *Tombeaux* written by Ronsard, Desportes, and Amadis Jamyn upon the death of Henri III's mistress Marie de Clèves in 1574. Both of Passerat's recent biographers, [Kathleen C. K.] Merken and Roger Patterson, have accepted Sorg's redating without dispute. Marie de Clèves died in childbirth, while Gabrielle d'Estrées died either of heatstroke or poisoning: the redating also explains Passerat's once-puzzling reference to Fleurie as being pregnant at the time of her death. Niré, thought to be an anagram for "(H)enri," would of course fit either king, but the rhyme between "Marie" and "Fleurie" is another clue to the mistress's true identity.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1574 was in fact the first year of Henri III's reign, and Passerat, like other professional scholars and poets dependent on patronage (and like other moderate Catholics) may well have been anxious to secure the good will of the new king with his



memorial sequence. Henri III, moreover, was well-known to have an affection for all things Italian--Italian culture was decidedly fashionable in France at that time--which doubtless helps account for Passerat's allusion to the Italian *villanella* in the *Tombeau*.

But Henri III proved to be a disastrous king in the eyes of most of his subjects, and this helped contribute to the reaction against Italian culture that set in; Italian imports such as the *villanella* fell out of favor in France over the course of the next two decades.<sup>24</sup> There is also no indication that Henri III took any particular notice of Passerat's lyric sequence dedicated to him, which was only one of many such sequences. For instance, there is no mention of Passerat in the five volumes of Henri III's letters, nor does Passerat rate an index entry in modern biographies of the monarch.<sup>25</sup>

A small historico-political sketch of late-sixteenth-century France may be incidentally helpful here to further emphasize the point that "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" and the king for whom it was written were by no means popular in Passerat's lifetime, and perhaps also to clarify why Passerat's reputation with French literary historians has rested chiefly on his connection to the *Satyre Ménippée* rather than on his authorship of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle." France had been enduring sporadic religious civil war for decades when in 1584 the Protestant Henri de Navarre became next in line for the throne then occupied by Henri III (Passerat's "Niré"), who was Catholic. The Catholic League was at once revived from dormancy with the stated goal of ensuring that the throne of France would never be occupied by a heretic. But the Catholic Leaguers--mainly high-ranking Catholic prelates, French nobles, and wealthy Parisian merchants--were no

fans of Henri III, who was considered despotic and sexually dissolute (he was bisexual and/or transvestite, by some accounts); the Leaguers instead backed Henri the Duke of Guise against Henri de Navarre. From 1586 to 1589 the War of the Three Henris raged. In May of 1588 Henri the Duke of Guise managed to occupy Paris with Swiss troops, forcing Henri III, humiliatingly, to flee his palace and his capital. The Catholic League ruled Paris. They governed by means of the Estates General, an informal but traditional assembly of nobles.

Henri III (poor bereft dove) had the Duke of Guise and several supporters killed in December of 1588, when they unwisely came to a parley with the king at the château in Blois. Henri III himself finally went after his lost *tourterelle* seven months later when he was stabbed by a Dominican lay brother on August 1, 1589. The Protestant Henri de Navarre by law inherited the throne. But Henri IV, as he then became, could not retake Paris from the Catholic Leaguers, though he spent the next several years trying. In May of 1593, Henri IV therefore announced his intention to convert to Catholicism, and he attended his first Mass in July. ("Paris is worth a Mass," he supposedly declared.) Many Catholic Leaguers were ready to support Henri IV as king from that point on, but many other Leaguers, especially those in positions of power in besieged Paris, scoffed at the idea that such a convenient conversion could be considered valid.

In that summer of 1593, then, there came into being yet another political pamphlet to swell the ranks of the hundreds that fluttered in the streets, this one distinguished from the others chiefly by its witty treatment of a deadly serious subject. The *Satyre Ménippée* mocked the principal Catholic Leaguers and defended the claims of Henri IV to the city

of Paris, the throne of France, and the mantle of Catholicism. The authors of the *Satyre Ménippée*, including Passerat, were Catholic, but they were what was known as *Politiques* ("Politicians"): staunch royalists who believed that religious tolerance was the best policy for war-wounded France. This was a dangerously moderate and secular position. It was also, of course, a humanist position. The news of Henri IV's decision to convert was infinitely welcome to the *Politiques*--breaking as it did a long stalemate, and presaging the end to the grim sequestration of Paris--and the continued resistance of ardent Leaguers, therefore, was frustrating in the extreme. New editions of the daring and amusing *Satyre Ménippée* could hardly be printed fast enough, and the work may have contributed to Henri IV's eventual success in entering Paris in March of 1594, after which he embarked upon a relatively long, peaceful, and productive reign. In the end, he was of course assassinated too, but not until 1610.<sup>26</sup>

Passerat's contribution to the *Satyre Ménippée* was not very great. That work is best-known for its "harangues"--speeches made by immediately recognizable caricatures of prominent Catholic Leaguers--and while Passerat was known to be an excellent satirist, there is nothing to suggest that he had anything to do with the writing of the harangues. His contribution is usually thought to consist of a few French lyrics and epigrams appended to the main text (although nothing in a Menippean satire is truly "main"). The *Satyre Ménippée* was anonymously authored, of course; Patterson points out that there is no "firm evidence" that Passerat wrote the pieces attributed to him in the *Satyre Ménippée*--but tradition if not evidence is firm on this point, and the pieces are in keeping with Passerat's other work (307). But even though his authorship is neither

confirmed nor primary, Passerat's connection to the influential *Satyre Ménippée* is always mentioned first in French literary histories.

In the context of Passerat's reputation both during his life and after it, then, it is clear that "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was a decidedly minor work until its "rediscovery" (tantamount to a plain discovery) in the middle of the nineteenth century. Only three French works published between 1574 and 1844 have been found that even mention the poem.<sup>27</sup> Of these, the most important is the 1751 edition of Pierre Richelet's *Dictionnaire de rimes*, which by some accounts could be the source of the myth of the fixed-form Renaissance villanelle. Kane points out that while several twentieth-century sources (Kastner's 1903 *A History of French Versification*, Cohen's 1922 *Lyric Forms from France*, Clive Scott's entry for "Villanelle" in the 1993 edition of the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*) say that Pierre Richelet fixed the form of the villanelle in the seventeenth century, no edition of Richelet's prosody manual *La versification françoise* contains any reference to "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" or to the villanelle as a fixed form. It is there, if anywhere, that such references ought to be located, not in a rhyming dictionary with purely supplementary essays on poetics. Moreover, Richelet's *Dictionnaire de rimes* was first published in 1692, but no edition of it contained a reference to "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" until the edition revised and expanded by Pierre Charles Berthelin in 1751. Berthelin's apparatus was reprinted in subsequent editions of the rhyming dictionary, and it is he, not Richelet, who might be credited with fixing the form--in the eighteenth century, not the seventeenth (Kane 211-27).

Having adjusted the names and dates of this matter, Kane comments that even still its relevance is doubtful: "Despite the fact that editor Pierre Charles Berthelin had decided to fix the form of the villanelle in 1751, no practicing poet seemed to notice for a century afterward" (227). But I differ from Kane in thinking that even the segment on the villanelle in Berthelin's apparatus does not fix the form of the villanelle, and for me this explains why no poet imitated "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" until Théodore de Banville published his "Villanelle de Buloz" in 1845. Close attention to the passage in Richelet is here necessary. Berthelin writes, "La Villanelle est une chanson de bergers. En voici une de Jean Passera" ("The Villanelle is a shepherd's song. Here is one by Jean Passerat"), and gives thereafter the full text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" (lxix-lxx). The rest of the brief entry is as follows: "Ce petit poëme est partagé par tercets, tous sous deux rimes en 'elle' et en 'oi': et les deux mêmes se trouvent ensemble à la fin de la pièce, font un quatrain au lieu d'un tercet. On trouve encore des Villanelles dont les couplets son de six vers" ("This little poem is divided into tercets, all under two rhymes in 'elle' and in 'oi': and the same two are found together at the end of the piece, making a quatrain instead of a tercet. One also finds Villanelles in which the verses have six lines") (lxx).

By "Ce petit poëme" Berthelin surely means *this particular* poem, not this *type* of poem--otherwise, that sentence would have to be understood as claiming that *all* villanelles must use the rhyme sounds "elle" and "oi."<sup>28</sup> The sentence is a desultory and misleading descriptive aside, not a definition; the villanelle is still defined primarily as a "shepherd's song" of varying form. It is also important to note that the difference between the French words *couplets* and *stances* or *strophes* is the equivalent of the difference

between "verses" (of a song) and "stanzas" or "strophes" (of a poem) in English. In English we would speak of the verses, not the stanzas, of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right." Berthelin's use of the word *couplets*, then, indicates that he, like all prosodists before him, regards the villanelle as a type of song rather than a type of poem. With no fixed form.

Therefore, I judge that the current misperception that Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was one example of a common fixed form called "the villanelle" originates with Wilhelm Ténint's 1844 *Prosodie de l'école moderne*. Ténint's *Prosodie* is the earliest work I have found that overtly and unambiguously holds up "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" as the model of a type, and it prompted the writing of new poems of that type very shortly afterward. The first of these poems was Théodore de Banville's "Villanelle de Buloz" of 1845, which is very explicitly based on "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"--one of its refrains is "J'ai perdu mon Limayrac." Passerat's originally obscure lyric had an unexpectedly powerful effect on some poets and critics of the nineteenth century, and whatever otiose handbooky remnants of interest twenty-first century poets and critics have in "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" are inherited from those nineteenth-century professional writers.

Sainte-Beuve's much-republished *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVIIe siècle*, first issued in 1828, drew a detailed portrait of Passerat's work and life that is worth our serious consideration here. The then-unremarked "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" is entirely absent from Sainte-Beuve's eight-page account. What is entirely present, however, is the conviction that Passerat's chief characteristic as a man and as a writer was his irrepressible and rather malicious

sense of humor. A little reading through Passerat's own writings and through scholarly writings about him confirms this impression, which a long excerpt from Sainte-Beuve can best convey.

[L]'originalité française n'était pas éteinte de France; l'esprit naïf et malin de nos trouvères, celui de Villon, de Rabelais et de Marot, ne pouvait mourir. Un ami de Ronsard, de Muret et de Baïf, un savant en grec et en latin, un successeur de Ramus au collège de France, Jean Passerat fut le premier poète, depuis la réforme de 1550, qui revint à la gaieté naturelle et à la bonne plaisanterie du vieux temps. C'était un de ces hommes comme il y en avait plus d'un au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, unissant les études fortes, les mœurs bourgeoises et les joyeux propos; travaillant quatorze heures par jour à des lexicques, à des commentaires; et, le soir, à un souper frugal, sachant rire avec ses amis; une de ces figures à physionomie antique qui rappellent Varron et Lucien tout ensemble. La plupart des vers de la *Satyre Ménippée* sont de lui, entre autres ce charmant quatrain, si fait pour être populaire:

Mais dites-moi, que signifie  
 Que les ligeurs ont double Croix?  
 C'est qu'en la Ligue on crucifie  
 Jésus-Christ encore une fois.

Bon et courageux citoyen, témoin contristé des horreurs du temps, il les prend rarement au sérieux dans ses vers. Un mot bouffon, une épigramme sur le nez camus du duc de Guise, un calembourg obscène ou trivial, lui plaisent bien mieux qu'une invective de colère; et du même ton qu'il médit du beau sexe et qu'il nargue les maris, il venge la religion et la France. [...]

Comme Rabelais, qu'il aimait beaucoup, et dont il avait commenté le *Pantagruel*, Passerat mourut le bon mot à la bouche. Devenu aveugle et paralytique, il recommandait à ses amis de jeter des fleurs sur sa tombe, mais surtout de n'y pas mettre de mauvais vers, qui pèseraient à sa cendre. (121-8)

French originality was not extinct in France; the naïve and malicious spirit of our troubadours, that of Villon, of Rabelais and of Marot, could not die. A friend of Ronsard, of Muret and of Baïf, a scholar in Greek and in Latin, a successor to Ramus in the Collège de France, Jean Passerat was the first poet since the reformation of 1550 who returned to the natural gaiety and to the delightful pleasantries of the old days. This was one of those men of whom there was more than one in the sixteenth century, uniting deep

study, bourgeois morals, and merry words; working fourteen hours a day on dictionaries, on commentaries; and, in the evening, at a frugal supper, knowing how to laugh with his friends; one of these figures of an antique physiognomy that calls to mind both Varron and Lucien. Most of the verses in the *Satyre Ménippée* are by him, among others this charming quatrain, so fashioned as to be popular:

But tell me, what does it mean  
That the Leaguers have a double cross?  
It means that the League has crucified  
Jesus Christ all over again.

A loyal and courageous citizen, an afflicted witness to all the horrors of the time, he rarely took them seriously in his verse. A word of buffoonery, an epigram on the pug nose of the Duke of Guise, an obscene or trivial pun, pleased him better than an angry invective; and in the same tone with which he vilified the fair sex and jeered at married men, he avenged religion and France. [...]

Like Rabelais, whom he much admired, and whose *Pantagruel* he commented on, Passerat died with a quip in his mouth. Having become blind and crippled, he recommended that his friends throw flowers on his grave, but to be especially sure not to leave bad verses there, as they would weigh down his ashes.

Setting aside Sainte-Beuve's characteristically Romantic emphasis on naïveté and his concern for the reputation of his nation's literature, what chiefly appears in this account is the portrait of a man with an almost involuntary sense of humor. All of which is just to say that the shade of Passerat no doubt enjoys the joke on history in which his "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" so oddly stars.

### **Textual Analysis of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"**

This poem, then, seems worthy of a long-overdue examination on its own terms. The first task is to establish an authoritative text. The only scholarly edition of the works of Passerat is Prosper Blanchemain's 1880 *Les poésies françaises de Jean Passerat*; this



work reprints the first extant text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" exactly, only altering "ß" to "ff" (a double long "s"). All other works quoting or reprinting the poem modernize the spelling and punctuation in widely different fashions, evidently without reference to Blanchemain's edition. Many textual variants are thus introduced. (See Appendix III for a full collation of twenty-eight texts, no two of which are the same, and a transcription of the first printed text with unmodernized characters). My own conviction is that for early modern texts where there is little or nothing to impede contemporary comprehension of the original, the spelling, punctuation, and lineation of the first manuscript or printing ought to be retained. As I argue below, modernizing this particular text erases one of its more interesting poetic devices.

I give here the text of the first published version, that of 1606. The type of that version is italic, which I have not retained; unlike Blanchemain, I have also modernized "i" to "j"; "f" (long "s") to "s"; "u" to "v"; and "ß" to "ss" according to standard practice. Otherwise, I have been careful to retain the spelling of the original, as well as its punctuation and lineation. See Figure 1 for a page image of the source text; I also include below an English prose translation of the poem that appeared in Geoffrey Brereton's 1958 *Penguin Book of French Verse*:

VILLANELLE.

J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle:  
 Est-ce point celle que j'oy?  
 Je veus aller après elle.  
     Tu regretes ta femelle,  
 Helas! aussi fai-je moy,  
 J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.  
     Si ton Amour est fidelle,  
 Aussi est ferme ma foy,

Je veus aller après elle.  
     Ta plainte se renouvelle;  
 Toujours plaindre je me doy:  
 J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.  
     En ne voyant plus la belle  
 Plus rien de beau je ne voy:  
 Je veus aller après elle.  
     Mort, que tant de fois j'appelle,  
 Pren ce qui se donne à toy:  
 J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle,  
 Je veus aller après elle. (*Recueil* 344-5)

I have lost my turtle-dove: Is that not she whom I hear? I want to go after her.

You pine for your mate. So, alas, do I. I have lost my turtle-dove.

If your love is faithful, so is my faith constant; I want to go after her.

Your grieving is renewed, I must grieve always; I have lost my turtle-dove.

No longer seeing my fair one, nothing fair can I see; I want to go after her.

Death, on whom I call so often, take what is offered you. I have lost my turtle-dove; I want to go after her. (*Brereton* 91-2)

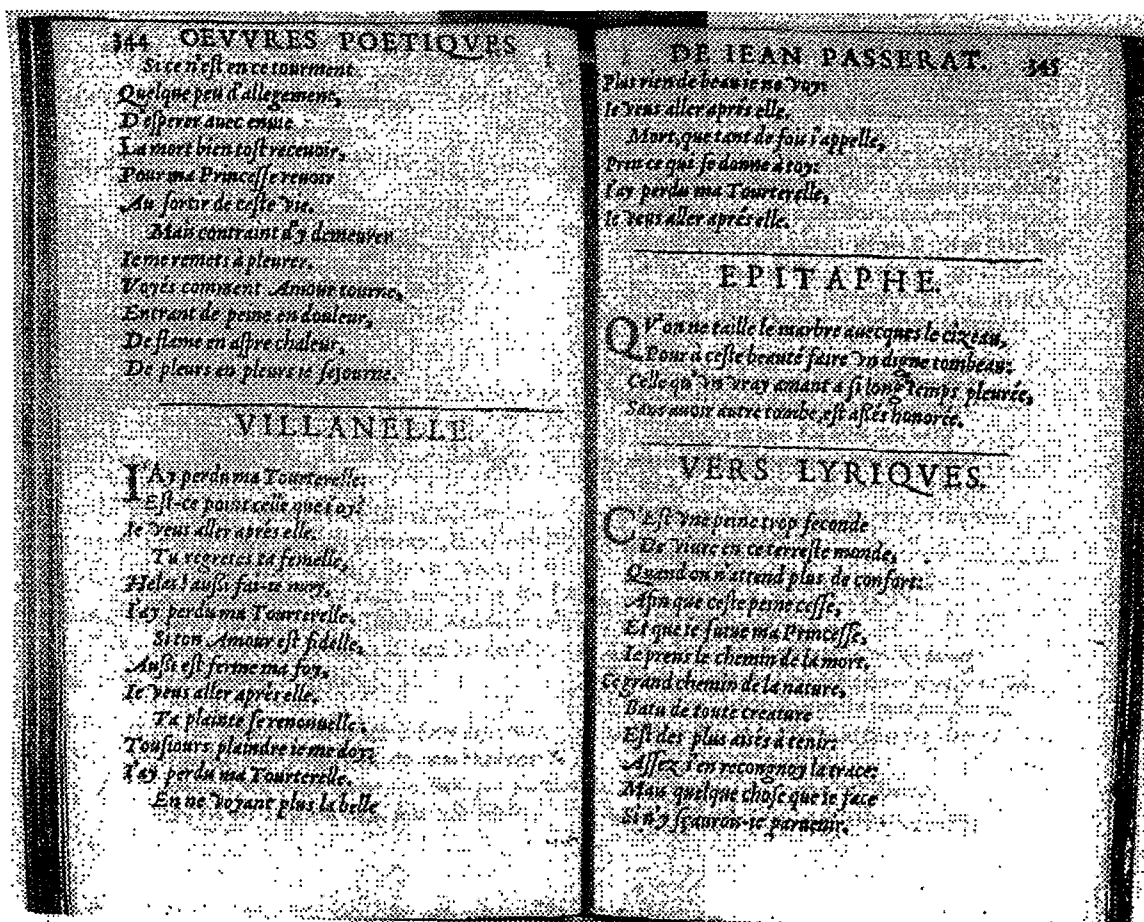


Figure 1: Jean Passerat, *Recueil des oeuvres poétiques de Ian Passerat augmenté de plus de la moitié, outre les précédentes impressions* (Paris: Morel, 1606) 344-5. Image from a microfilm of a copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

Apart from its now-familiar formal scheme, the most striking characteristic of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"--even to modern eyes and ears--is its plain style. The syntax is generally straightforward, the sentences are brief and declarative, the vocabulary is not Latinate, and there are no classical allusions in the poem--even though Passerat was one of the most reputable classical scholars of the sixteenth century. Passerat was in fact generally out of step with the French poets of his time in this regard; to Passerat's more famous

poetic contemporaries in the *Pléiade* (Ronsard, Du Bellay, et al.), a poem such as "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" would have looked both slightly dated and excessively ordinary. Indeed, more than one critic has remarked that Passerat's style in this and other poems is reminiscent of Clément Marot (1496-1544), the chief poet of the previous generation, whose colloquial works fell out of favor with the learned ornamentarians of the *Pléiade*.<sup>29</sup> Passerat admired simplicity.

Another interesting feature of the poem is its conspicuous etymological doubling. Once the mourning dove is likened to the mourning lover in the second tercet with the phrase "aussi fai-je moy" ("so do I"), each of the following tercets introduces an etymologically linked word pair that reinforces the comparison: "fidelle" / "foy" ("faithful" / "faith"); "plainte" / "plaindre" ("complaint" / "complain"); "belle" / "beau" ("beauty" [feminine] / "beauty" [masculine]). These pairs serve to link the first and second lines in each tercet, creating almost the effect of a couplet. Similar wordplay is common in Passerat's lyrics, as for instance in this sestet of a sonnet in the *Tombeau*:

Faites dorenavant que les lis argentés,  
 Lis honneur des François sur ma tombe plantés,  
 Le plus bel ornement de la terre fleurie,  
 Portent à tout jamais marque de ma douleur;  
 Et les voyant tachés d'une noire couleur,  
 Qu'on y lise mon nom & celui de Fleurie. (*Recueil* 327)

See to it henceforth that the silvered lilies  
 (Lilies, honor of the French, planted on my grave,  
 The loveliest ornament of the flowered earth)  
 Bear for all eternity the mark of my grief;  
 And seeing them smudged with an inky hue,  
 The world will read my name and that of Fleurie.

The double chime of "fleurie" ("flowered") and "Fleurie" (the name given to "Niré's" mistress) has of course been arranged by Passerat to serve as a key feature of the whole sequence, but chimes such as "lis" ("lilies") and "lise" ("read") are unique to each particular lyric. In this sonnet, the "lis/lise" pairing drives the whole poem; the central trope of "reading the lilies" is a semantic device derived from the arbitrary resemblance of the two words. In "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," similarly, the central (more subtle) trope--which might be described as doubling, repetition, circularity, mirroring, pairing, coupling, dual identity, infinite regress, semblance, resemblance--draws semantic power from the likeness of signs.

Another doubling effect of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" (and of Passerat's other lyrics) is strictly visual--an effect that can certainly seem arbitrary, so much so that modern readers seem to have missed it altogether. There is good reason to believe that Passerat (or his nephew, Jean de Rougevalet, who edited Passerat's posthumous publications, or possibly a printer) deliberately ensured that all the line-endings within every poem were spelled alike, even when this entailed altering a more or less accepted spelling. The word "fidelle" in line seven, for instance (which rhymes with "Tourterelle," "femelle," and other double-"l" words in the poem), is spelled with only one "l" at the beginning of a line of another poem printed only two pages before "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle": "Fidele Amant qui planta ce Cyprés, / Digne tu fus de meillure adventure" (*Recueil* 342). This phenomenon occurs elsewhere in the *Tombeau* as well; the word spelled "trouve" ("find") in one poem is spelled "treuve" in another when it occurs as a line-ending rhymed with "fleuve": "S'il n'y trouve plus d'eau ny verdure ny fleurs";

"Autre remede à mon mal ne se treuve. / Revien Charon pour me passer le fleuve" (*Recueil* 330, 326). Variant spelling of words was of course perfectly common in the sixteenth century, before spellings had been standardized--but the correct modern spellings are "fidèle" and "trouve," which suggests (though in hindsight) that the line-ending spellings of "fidelle" and "treuve" were then, as they are now, *less* correct. The line-ending spellings clearly do not vary at random. Even a quick look through Passerat's *Recueil* shows a very high incidence of homographia in the rhyme words. The unanimous *visual* recurrence of "-elle" and "-oy" as line-endings, then, is surely as deliberate a poetic device as their aural recurrence as rhymes. To modernize the spelling of the line-endings, as so many authors and editors do when quoting or reprinting "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," is to destroy this visual rhyme.<sup>30</sup>

The double refrain that is so prominent a feature of the nineteen-line villanelle, then, is on the one hand typical of Passerat's affection for linguistic doubling of all kinds, but it is on the other hand specific to "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," in which the lover and his love, the humans and the doves, this world and the next are indistinguishable, virtually identical.<sup>31</sup> The simple declarative statements "I have lost my turtle-dove" and "I want to go after her" lose the linear elapse of cause and effect, coming to seem simultaneous, interchangeable, mirrored. Philip K. Jason asserts that "the villanelle is often used, and properly used, to deal with one or another degree of obsession" (140) and while this statement applies far less to villanelles circa 1900 than it does to villanelles circa 1950 and 2000, it is certainly true that the first villanelle can be read as obsessive.<sup>32</sup> There is no visible logic such as "I have lost my turtledove, *therefore* I want to go after

her" in the poem, because that would imply, however slightly, the possibility of another consequence besides the one the speaker is fixed upon. The "if" of the phrase "Si ton Amour est fidelle" ("If your love is faithful") is not a real "if," suggesting contingency and ambiguity and multiple possibilities, because the turtledove is already an emblem of unswerving fidelity. The very notion that a turtledove could be unfaithful is counterintuitive (akin to the notion of a nightingale with a sour voice); the "if" carries more the sense of a "since" or an "as," serving to emphasize the resemblance between the lover and the turtledove. Both are equally faithful to their faithful mates, and therefore either the mourning lover or the mourning dove could speak the refrains. Their two laments are one.

As though learning the trick of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," many contemporary villanelles have used the double-refrain villanelle to depict stark and inexorable psychological pathologies: Rita Dove's "Parsley"; Edward Hirsch's "Ocean of Grass"; Donald Justice's "In Memory of the Unknown Poet Robert Boardman Vaughan"; Derek Mahon's "Antarctica"; Marilyn Waniek's "Daughters, 1900"; Michael Ryan's "Milk the Mouse"; Tom Disch's "The Rapist's Villanelle"; Sylvia Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song." And as though it were the best illustration of a tragic state of mind, Reetika Vazirani's villanelle "It's Me, I'm Not Here" was the only poem quoted in full in a *Washington Post Magazine* story concerning how the poet came to kill herself and her two-year-old son Jehan (19). Yet "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" can also be read as sentimental, conventional; the inconsequential "society" villanelles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are equally legitimate descendants of the turtledove. The trope of the grieving lover fixed

on following his dead amour to the grave is merely conventional in the context of sixteenth-century Petrarchanism. In some ways "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" is more effective when read out of the context of its royal sequence (and it has virtually always been read out of context when it has been read at all in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), since this renders its deferential conservatism less visible. Strand and Boland's small slip in speaking of "his" (i.e., Passerat's) "lost turtledove" reflects the fact that critics have been unaware that the poem was part of a sequence written for a royal patron.

And indeed the poem is more respectable by modern standards if it is imagined to be in the voice of a romantic self attempting to express a deeply-felt internal psychological drama. Few poems in Passerat's vernacular oeuvre could sustain such an interpretation, as even the nineteenth-century revivers of Passerat recognized. Passerat's editor Blanchemain, who was familiar with all Passerat's vernacular lyrics, opines that "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" "se trouve comme égarée au milieu d'élégies quasi-officielles" ("turns up like a stray in the middle of quasi-official elegies") (vii); while Joseph Boulmier, a fervent admirer of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" but not of Passerat's other poetry, calls it a "naïf chef-d'oeuvre échappée, Dieu sait comme, à la plume du savant Passerat" ("naïve masterpiece escaped, God knows how, from the pen of the scholar Passerat") (7). But when Blanchemain and Boulmier wrote those assessments (in 1880 and 1878, respectively), Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" had already been mistakenly hailed as the best example of a schematic type, and new poems in the same form had already been written. I would argue that "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" only looks



exceptional in hindsight; we necessarily see it differently because of the poems that have come after it. Neither reading--the "obsessive" and the "conventional"--is more authoritative than another; the poem wears both aspects comfortably. Wink an eye, it moves one way; wink the other, it moves the other way.

### **Translations of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"**

There has been very little recent historical or interpretive commentary on "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," a situation that I have tried to rectify above. Apart from its scheme the poem has been supremely unimportant in the twentieth century. Yet because of its influential form the poem has been on occasion been quoted, anthologized, and especially translated, and therefore I examine here some of the more important of these sporadic moments of critical attention. The English translations, in particular, reveal the character of the twentieth-century critical reception of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle."<sup>33</sup>

English translations of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" have not chosen to or have not been able to convey the poem's plain style, preferring instead to render it as archaic. I have found seven published translations of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" into English verse: one by George Wyndham (1906), one by John Payne (1907), one by Wilfrid Charles Thorley (1920), one by William Frederic Giese (1946), one by Elizabeth Gerteiny (1973), one by Philip K. Jason (1980), and one by Anne Waldman (1987).<sup>34</sup> These translations without exception, though to a greater or lesser degree, employ archaisms that Passerat himself would have disliked; Patterson writes that Passerat was "opposed to those linguistic antiquarians who, in pushing to excess the search for a

purified Latin style, deliberately sought out the most archaic of words. [...] In Passerat's estimation this deliberate affectation of archaisms was [...] an affront to good taste" (146-7). Of the modern translations, the one that best conveys the straightforward diction and tone of Passerat's original is probably Jason's; however, Jason does not attempt the rhyme, and what he calls his "rather free rendering" is in fact a purely functional convenience (145). It is appended in a footnote to his scholarly article on the inherent qualities of the villanelle scheme, which is titled "Modern Versions of the Villanelle." But since Jason generally retains Passerat's seven-syllable line, and since he lineates his translation as a poem, I have included it in the list of poetic translations.

Yet even Jason's uncomplicated and accurate piece translates "tu" as "thou," as do all the translations except Waldman's and Wyndham's. This translation, of course, is grammatically accurate, since there is no other English equivalent for the informal second-person pronoun distinction in French--but "thou" is inevitably archaic in English, while "tu" is not archaic in French. Gerteiny's 1973 translation, in fact, incorporates a grammatical error in the third tercet through using "thou": "Say ye thou hast lealty shown? / Peer to thine, my constancy; / So go I or be undone" (70). The word "ye" can denote either the polite singular pronoun or the plural pronoun (just as the French word "vous" can denote either the polite singular or the plural), but neither of these senses of "ye" is possible when coupled with the informal singular "thou." Anne Waldman's 1987 translation gives the second line of the second tercet as "Alas! I really do," combining a highly archaic word with a highly colloquial phrase in a highly irregular diction.

Giese's translation of 1946 is somewhat less archaic than Gerteiny's, and it bravely addresses the difficulty of rhyming "turtledove," adopting the classic expedient of eye-rhyme. In Giese's translation, the fifth tercet becomes "Thy sad plaining fills the grove, / Mine re-echoes far and near: / I have lost my turtle-dove" (67). Thorley's 1920 translation, like those of Payne and Gerteiny, translates "tourterelle" as something other than "turtledove" for the sake of a more common rhyme sound. Thorley also deliberately generates an effect of antiquity by using archaic spellings even for common modern words such as "own" and "blown"; he renders the first tercet as "I have lost my turtle fleet: / Is that her owne voice blowne bye? / After her I fayne would beat" (90). Payne's translation of 1907 is emphatically committed to the practice of archaism, rendering the first tercet as "I have lost my turtle-doo. / Is't not she I hear hard by? / After her I'd fain ensue," a translation that also introduces either a neologism or an obscure term with the word "turtle-doo" for the sake of an easier rhyme (539).

The earliest translation, George Wyndham's of 1906, is perhaps the best of the rhymed verse translations; it eschews the archaic "thou" and renders "tourterelle" in the simplest fashion as "turtle-dove." The first tercet becomes "I have lost my turtle-dove; / Is not that her call to me? / To be with her were enough." But even Wyndham's translation does not correspond as well as it might to Passerat's original. For instance, Wyndham introduces a strong enjambment in the fifth tercet: "Seeing no more in the grove / Her's, no beauty can I see; / To be with her were enough," and enjambment is a far more serious and unusual thing in early French poetry than in English poetry. Wyndham also makes greater use of syntactic inversion than does Passerat, and he includes an exclamation

point in the final quatrain of both his English translation and the text of the French original, a variant that Edmund Gosse and George Saintsbury had both previously printed.<sup>35</sup> This small punctuation change nevertheless significantly alters the calm, resigned tone of the concluding quatrain of the original.

I include here a new verse translation of my own. One of the chief difficulties of translating "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" into verse is that by far the most natural translation for "tourterelle" is "turtledove," a word that in English has few exact rhymes. Jason omits rhyme altogether; Gerteiny, Payne, and Thorley choose easier rhyme sounds (though Gerteiny still uses off-rhyme); Giese employs eye-rhyme; Wyndham and Waldman employ both eye-rhyme and off-rhyme--and Waldman also chooses to render the poem as non-metrical. None of these solutions quite suits the original with its insistently perfect line-endings. The many forms of tenacious reiteration in "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" made it seem allowable to introduce a form of reiteration *not* present in the original, one that made the task of reproducing the rhyme scheme much easier. Surely no poet has ever had more legitimate cause to rhyme "love" and "dove"--even repeatedly, as I have chosen to do. This repetition can serve as a substitute for the homographia of the original's rhymes.

#### Villanelle

I have lost my turtledove:  
 Isn't that her gentle coo?  
 I will go and find my love.

Here you mourn your mated love;  
 Oh, God--I am mourning too:  
 I have lost my turtledove.

If you trust your faithful dove,  
Trust my faith is just as true;  
I will go and find my love.

Plaintively you speak your love;  
All my speech is turned into  
"I have lost my turtledove."

Such a beauty was my dove,  
Other beauties will not do;  
I will go and find my love.

Death, again entreated of,  
Take one who is offered you:  
I have lost my turtledove;  
I will go and find my love.

## Conclusion

The preceding history, interpretation, and new translation of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" are meant to emphasize the similarities, rather than the differences, between the contemporary villanelle in English and its sixteenth-century French template. Formal poetry is often historically othered even by the contemporary poets who write it; English translations of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" have contributed to this historical othering by rendering the poem with archaisms that Passerat's original never possessed, and references to the poem in handbooks and anthologies have misrepresented it by their lack of sustained critical attention to it in its historical context. Since we already know that poetry has only recently been professionalized, since we already know that the naïve intricacies of the villanelle form could only have been invented in an era of innocent narrow-mindedness, never in our own era of ironic, politicized self-consciousness, why investigate farther?

## CHAPTER TWO: Young Men of Talent

Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," though generally ignored by twentieth-century poets and scholars, has at least attained a certain cursory eminence in poetic handbooks as an example (the only one) of the Renaissance nineteen-line villanelle. How did this come about? The short answer: through a series of errors made in the service of certain nineteenth-century artistic and critical agendas. The Parnassian movement and its post-Romantic relatives in both France and England excavated archaic forms, particularly medieval and Renaissance forms, as a protest against both the vulgarity of bourgeois materialism and the restraint of neoclassical rationalism.<sup>36</sup> The archaic forms were meant to revive in the current age the fervent idealism and unselfconscious emotion of what the post-Romantics regarded as a nobler era. In their general enthusiasm for the quaint, intricate innocence of the forms of the medieval French *trouvères* (troubadours)--the triolet, the ballade, the rondeau, the chant royal--nineteenth-century post-Romantics swept up Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" and accorded it and its form a new consequence.

Wilhelm (also "Wilhem") Ténint's 1844 *Prosodie de l'école moderne* attempted to outline a unified prosodic theory of French Romantic poetry and to legitimize its techniques, and in the course of this proceeding Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" was held up as the best example of a common Renaissance form. In 1845, Théodore de Banville--who had edited and promoted Ténint's *Prosodie*--published a poem modeled very closely after Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle": "Villanelle de Buloz." This ephemeral, trivial, satiric poem, legible and interesting only to a small audience for a few weeks in the fall of 1845, was the unlikely progenitor of the modern villanelle. After its

birth, Banville and his friend Philoxène Boyer would remain the only poets to write villanelles on the Ténint model for a good thirty years--and they only wrote four between the two of them.

The propagation of the villanelle as a form swung into full gear only in the eighteen-seventies, being carried out by four poetic treatises, two French and two English: Théodore de Banville's 1872 *Petit traité de poésie française*; Edmund Gosse's 1877 article in the *Cornhill Magazine*, "A Plea For Certain Exotic Forms of Verse"; Austin Dobson's 1878 essay in W. Davenport Adams' *Latter-Day Lyrics*, "A Note on Some Foreign Forms of Verse"; and Joseph Boulmier's 1878 *Villanelles, suivies de poésies en langage du XVIIe siècle*. It was Banville's *Petit traité* that caused Gosse and Dobson to begin writing villanelles in English, and it was they who promoted the villanelle to the Anglophone poetic establishment. Boulmier's eccentric *Villanelles* poses more of a problem in terms of determining influence; Gosse certainly became aware of the work, but the mere existence of a book-length collection of nineteen-line double-refrain villanelles probably had more to do with establishing the villanelle in that fixed form than anything Boulmier actually wrote, though Boulmier is virtually always mentioned in twentieth-century histories of the villanelle.

## Wilhelm Ténint

The Paris of the early eighteen-forties may not have been the besieged Paris of the early fifteen-nineties, but it still had its share of partisan upheavals, both literary and political, and it is in this disputatious context that Ténint's *Prosodie de l'école moderne*

must be placed. Literarily, the lion of the day was Victor Hugo, who was a giant (*the* giant) of French Romanticism in verse as well as in prose and drama. Romanticism had gained ascendancy over a lingering neoclassicism in France sometime in the late eighteen-twenties, when a number of important works appeared: Emile Deschamps' preface to his 1828 *Etudes françaises et étrangères* (*Studies French and Foreign*), which served as a manifesto to the Romantic movement; Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve's *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre française au XVIe siècle* (*Historical and Critical Tableau of French Poetry and French Theater in the Sixteenth Century*), which championed the revival of the emotional and idealistic literature of the Renaissance; Alfred de Vigny's passionate version of *Othello*, first performed in 1829; and Victor Hugo's formally and thematically controversial play *Hernani*, which debuted in February of 1830.<sup>37</sup> The greater colloquialism and social awareness of Romantic literature coincided with an ideologically similar political shift. The July Revolution of 1830 removed the autocratic King Charles X and replaced him with a more liberal monarch, Louis-Philippe, whose amenability to a democratic ideal wherein leaders are chosen by the people rather than by God was marked by his rule as "King of the French" rather than "King of France." During the eighteen-thirties and most of the eighteen-forties Romanticism still had its clashes with the lofty traditions of classicism (embodied in the powerful and conservative *Académie française*), but there were also other factions to contend with. As early as 1833, in the preface to his collection of poems titled *Albertus, ou, l'âme et le péché* ("Albertus, or, Soul and Sin"), Théophile Gautier objected to the neo-Platonic Romantic principle that art should be of social



utility. His objections would bear twins: the schools of Art for Art's Sake and Parnassianism, both of which "advocated the liberation of art from the kind of [Romantic] didacticism that tended to render it subservient to specific causes and programs during the reigns of Louis-Philippe and Louis-Napoleon from 1830 to 1870" (Denommé 1). Gautier's 1852 poem "*L'Art*," written in response to a poem by Théodore de Banville, would come to be regarded as the essential verse redaction of the principles of Art for Art's Sake.<sup>38</sup> Ténint's *Prosodie*, with its preface by Emile Deschamps and its letter of endorsement by Victor Hugo, immediately positioned itself as belonging to the Romantic school; its natural emphasis on technique, however, made it a useful text in the following years for Parnassianism.

Little was known about Wilhelm Ténint prior to Patricia Siegel's introduction to the 1987 reprint of the *Prosodie de l'école moderne*, whose full title is *Wilhelm Ténint et sa Prosodie de l'école moderne, avec des documents inédits (Wilhelm Ténint and His Prosody of the Modern School, With Previously Unpublished Documents)*. The editors of the 1986 edition of Théophile Gautier's correspondence, for example, were unable to discover anything about Ténint besides the fact of his works: "Nous ne savons rien sur ce littérateur qui écrivait la *Prosodie de l'Ecole moderne* en 1843; *Les Français sous la Révolution* en 1846 et trois romans (deux en 1845 et un sans date)" ("We know nothing of this author who wrote the *Prosody of the Modern School* in 1843, *The French Under the Revolution* in 1846 and three novels (two in 1845 and one undated)") (Gautier, *Correspondance*, II.362). Siegel's thorough labor paints a fascinating portrait of this inglorious (though not mute) figure.

Siegel characterizes Wilhelm Ténint as a minor writer on the make, an acquaintance of canonized figures such as Emile Deschamps and Théophile Gautier and a worshipful disciple of the deity Victor Hugo.<sup>39</sup> Born in 1813, Ténint became a petty official at the Ministry of the Interior in Paris at about the age of twenty-one. Paris was at that time rife with journals espousing this or that aesthetic and/or political cause, and there was little distinction between the literary author (of poetry, novels, plays) and the journalist. Ténint became a member of the gangland coterie that spent its time in founding reviews, collecting funds for reviews, writing contributions to reviews, applauding allied reviews, excoriating enemy reviews, and even fighting duels over reviews. In 1836, Émile de Girardin fought and killed one Armand Carrel over trivial circumstances related to the founding of Girardin's opinionated, inexpensive, and consequently highly popular review *La Presse*--to which Ténint became a contributor in 1840.<sup>40</sup> Siegel, attempting to account for this success by "un jeune inconnu" ("a young unknown"), speculates that Ténint's friendship with the brother of editor Augustin Challamel may have given him entrée into these circles (9). Girardin's wife Delphine, however--herself a noted journalist and *saloniste*--opined in an 1839 entry in her *Chroniques Parisiennes (Parisian Chronicles)* that nothing was simpler for a young man than to make a name for himself by way of the reviews:

On dit enfin: *Il est difficile de se faire un nom à Paris!* Mensonge! rien n'est plus facile aujourd'hui. Il paraît chaque matin, il s'imprime chaque semaine cent journaux ennemis et vingt revues rivales qui ne savent que dire, et qui s'estiment trop heureux quand vous voulez bien leur fournir

gratis quelques pages amusantes, quand vous leur donnez l'occasion de dire un peu de mal de leur ennemi en vous vantant. Rien n'est plus facile pour un jeune homme de talent que de se faire un nom dans les journaux. Demandez plutôt à ces vieux journalistes sans talent qui sont si célèbres. (201)

Finally, they say, "It's hard to make a name for yourself in Paris." Lie! Nothing is easier today. Published every morning, printed every week are a hundred enemy journals and twenty rival reviews that do nothing but talk, and which esteem themselves only too happy when you want to furnish them with some amusing pages for nothing, giving them the chance to say something a little malicious about their enemy while you show off. Nothing is easier for a young man of talent than to make a name in the journals. Ask rather about these old journalists without talent who are so celebrated.

Ténint was undoubtedly just such a young man of talent in the early eighteen-forties, and he engaged in the hotly debated issues of the day--quite possibly at the *salon* of Madame de Girardin herself, whom he much admired: he published a flattering article on her writings in 1841. By 1842, Ténint was accepted as a member of the *Société des Gens de Lettres* (Society of Men of Letters).

One of the many review wrangles concerned the legitimacy of Hugolian poetic form, which departed from many of the neoclassical poetic norms of the eighteenth

century. The first lines of Hugo's 1830 play *Hernani*, for example, threw down the formal gauntlet with a particularly brash enjambment. Hugo also frequently introduced two caesuras rather than one into the twelve-syllable Alexandrine that had dominated French verse since the seventeenth century, so that the line was subtly divided into three parts rather than two. (This three-part line is called *trimètre*, which is of course not the equivalent of the English "trimeter.") Hugo and other French Romantic poets also experimented with short line lengths and novel rhyme schemes, often creating unity in their verse with stronger degrees of rhyme than usual.<sup>41</sup> The neoclassicists scoffed at the irregularity of such *vers brisés* ("broken lines"), and therefore both Gautier and Deschamps called for a new kind of prosody, one that would include and legitimize the new poetry. Ténint took up this challenge.

Ténint completed a manuscript of the *Prosodie* and sent it to the lofty Victor Hugo, who vaguely but graciously praised the work in a letter dated May 16, 1843. This letter was published with the *Prosodie* itself early in 1844, along with a preface by Emile Deschamps (adapted from an earlier article titled "*Nécessité d'une Prosodie*" ["The Necessity of a Prosody"]). There is also convincing evidence that Ténint was helped in his work by Théodore de Banville, who was then the newest darling of Parisian literary Romantics--a twenty-year-old *wunderkind* whose 1842 collection of poetry *Les Cariatides* had earned him much acclaim. This evidence is as follows: Ténint's *Prosodie* had a very small first edition that was deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1843 and published in January of 1844; a copy of this first edition at the Bibliothèque Nationale has marginal corrections concerning La Fontaine that several experts agree are

in the handwriting of Banville. The second, larger edition published by Didier later in 1844 includes those corrections; hence the conclusion (persuasive, though otherwise undocumented) that Banville collaborated with Ténint in revising, perhaps even in writing, the *Prosodie*.

The entry for "*La villanelle*" in the *Prosodie*, which appears just after an entry on "*L'echo ou couronnée*" and just before one on "*Le triolet*," quotes "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" in full in the character of a representative example. The explication of the form is clearly prescriptive, addressed to a reader who wants to know the rules so that s/he may follow them in original compositions. The full text is as follows:

Vieux rythme, d'une grâce et d'une naïveté charmantes, à qui  
plusieurs poètes modernes ont essayé de rendre la vogue.<sup>42</sup>

Un exemple vaudra mieux que toutes les explications; voici le  
chef-d'oeuvre des villanelles:

J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.  
N'est-ce point elle que j'oi?  
Je veux aller après elle.

Tu regrettes ta femelle.  
Hélas! ainsi fais-je, moi.  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.

Si ton amour est fidèle,  
Aussi est ferme ma foi.  
Je veux aller après elle.

Ta plainte se renouvelle.  
Toujours plaindre je me doi.  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.

En ne voyant plus ma belle,  
Plus rien de beau je ne voi.

Je veux aller après elle.

Mort que tant de fois j'appelle,  
Prends ce qui se donne à toi.  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.

Je veux aller après elle.

Jean Passerat

On remarquera que la villanelle est une sorte de *terza rima* faite d'un bout à l'autre avec les mêmes rimes. Le premier et le dernier vers du premier tercet finissent à tour de rôle les tercets suivants. Seulement on doit s'arrêter sur un tercet finissant par le premier vers (J'ai perdu ma tourterelle), parce que le dernier vers (Je veux aller après elle) est destiné à former le noeud. (258-9)

An old form, of a charming grace and naïveté, which many modern poets have tried to make fashionable.

One example will be worth more than all explanations; here is the masterpiece of villanelles: [text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"].

One will notice that the villanelle is a kind of *terza rima* constructed with the same rhymes laid end to end. The first and the last lines of the first tercet complete the following tercets in turn. But one must stop on a tercet finishing with the first line ("I have lost my turtledove"), because the last line ("I want to go after her") is destined to tie the knot.

Several points are worthy of remark. First, the terms "grace" and "naïveté" are well-worn red flags waved in the face of the thudding rationality of the neoclassicists,

and embodied in those two terms is the Romantic rejection of all that is bourgeois. Aristocratic grace or peasant naïveté, but nothing in the crass between. "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" would come to be much admired in the nineteenth century precisely for its naïveté, though it was, as I have argued, a perfect mimicry of naïveté (rather like the ballads of Burns) instead of an "authentic" naïveté. Second, Ténint defines the villanelle not as a nineteen-line fixed form, but as a stanza type; Banville in his poems and in his 1872 *Petit traité de poésie française* would do likewise, and most French poets attempting the villanelle adopted this model. It was primarily the English poets who would come to adopt the stricter nineteen-line model.

It should also be noted that Ténint's claim that many modern poets have been trying to make the villanelle fashionable cannot be substantiated. There are no known villanelles on the Passerat model prior to 1845 (other than "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," of course). Ténint might well have been thinking of Gautier's 1837 "Villanelle Rythmique," but this poem was *not* on the Passerat model (being a villanelle strictly by the earlier "pastoral song" definition, consisting of three stanzas with the rhyme scheme *ababcdcd*), and in any case it was a lone example.<sup>43</sup> Yet it is generally true that Romantic poets were beginning to revive Renaissance forms at this time. Ténint claims that the villanelle is In, and that is false; but he also claims that the sonnet is In, and that claim has at least a grain of truth. Siegel contradicts Ténint's claim that the poets of his day were writing many sonnets, but it may be more true than she concedes. "L'école moderne a remis le sonnet en vigueur," writes Ténint. "Quelques poètes ont publié même des volumes entiers de sonnets, ce qui est pousser beaucoup trop loin le culte de ce rythme charmant" (234-5)

("The modern school has brought the sonnet back to vigor. Some poets have even published entire volumes of sonnets, which is pushing the cult of this charming form too far"). Siegel annotates these sentences with a blunt "L'existence de ce recueil est une invention de Ténint" ("The existence of this collection is an invention of Ténint's") (235). As Siegel points out, Gautier and Sainte-Beuve had begun to champion the previously moribund form, but their work would not begin to bear fruit in French until later in the century. But while the revival of the sonnet in French had not yet taken hold, there were in fact famous collections of Romantic sonnets in other languages that would surely have been familiar to Ténint. Wordsworth's *Sonnets* had been published in 1838, for instance, and the renowned Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (who lived as an expatriate in Paris throughout the eighteen-thirties) had published two volumes of sonnets in 1826 that were well-known in Parisian Romantic circles.<sup>44</sup> Ténint, therefore, is not inventing things in this instance. Nevertheless, if other young French Romantics besides Ténint and Banville in 1844 were admiring Passerat and writing villanelles in their own language, no trace remains of it.

The reputation of France in international Romantic circles is certainly one of the concerns inflecting Ténint's *Prosodie*, and that concern is probably one of the chief causes of Ténint's claim that the villanelle is popular. France was tardy to Romanticism; the movement in England and Germany had begun in the late eighteenth century--fueled, of course, by fascination with the passionate ideals of the French Revolution--whereas (as I mentioned above) it was not until the eighteen-twenties that French authors and intellectuals began to be strongly influenced by the ardent iconoclasm of Romantic



principles. Henri Peyre speculates that it may have been the Revolution itself, almost paradoxically, that delayed Romanticism in France:

The immediate impact of the events of 1789-1791 was felt more keenly by German and English poets than by French writers, in spite of the fact that the latter witnessed the development of this astounding series of incidents and some even took part in them. . . . In 1820 and even a little later, the memory of emigration, the Reign of Terror, compulsory military service under Napoleon, and the invasion of their country in 1814 and 1815 was still too fresh in their minds. (56, 58)

Ténint and other French Romantics (especially Sainte-Beuve) were acutely conscious of their nation's laggardry in this international intellectual movement, and they worked hard to build a literature in French that could measure up to the literature of Goethe and Byron. No mention is made by either Berthelin or Ténint of the Italian *villanella*, and since the example they cite is French, it certainly looks as though they both regarded the villanelle as a French form (again, like the triolet). Ténint does aver that the villanelle is "a kind of *terza rima*," but the implicit claim seems to be that it is a French version of that Italian form. To champion the villanelle was to champion France. To claim that many poets were writing villanelles was to claim that French literature was influential.

A final point to remark upon in Ténint's villanelle entry is that the text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" he gives is very corrupt. Two words are entirely changed ("celle" to "elle" and "aussi" to "ainsi"); and there are a great many other, smaller variants.

Ténint's text is so corrupt that textual collation (see Appendix III) is insufficient to

determine whether his text was taken from the Berthelin apparatus of the Richelet rhyming dictionary, but editions of the Richelet rhyming dictionary had appeared in 1810 and 1817, and these would probably have been more available to Ténint than any of the three seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works that printed the text. The kind of poetry Ténint and the other Romantics were writing could scarcely have been written *without* a rhyming dictionary. The ambiguities in the Richelet rhyming dictionary (discussed above) probably contributed to Ténint's belief that the villanelle was a schematic form. It is also highly likely that Ténint had read about Passerat in Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve's monumental and popular *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVIIe siècle*, first published 1828, which had been republished in 1838, 1842, and 1843. Sainte-Beuve's work devotes eight pages to Passerat, but does not mention, let alone reprint, "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle." Still, Ténint's attention to Passerat might well derive from Sainte-Beuve's influence.

Attempts to promote the *Prosodie* were largely unsuccessful. Gautier published a review in Girardin's *La Presse* on the fifteenth of January, 1844, almost simultaneous with the publishing of the *Prosodie* itself. In that review (which Siegel reprints in full), Gautier defends the Romantics as the true inheritors of the classical spirit, lauds Hugo and Lamartine for their work in freeing French poetry from the bonds of the Alexandrine, and carefully praises Ténint's work for its contribution to the study of versification and the promotion of Romanticism:

Par une contradiction assez bizarre, les hommes qui se prétendent classiques en s'opposant aux coupes et aux enjambements des vers romantiques, ne s'aperçoivent pas qu'ils sont imités des poètes grecs et latins, objet de leur admiration exclusive; ainsi, André Chenier, cette

abeille de l'anthologie, est plein de vers brisés, de même que Ronsard et les poètes de la Pléiade, qui savaient l'Iliade et l'Odyssee par coeur, et composaient couramment sur tous les mètres dans la langue d'Homère et de Virgile. [...] Déjà Lamartine avec ses grands coups d'ailes, ses élégances enchevêtrées comme des lianes en fleurs, ses larges périodes, ses vastes nappes de vers s'étalent comme des fleuves d'Amérique avait fait crever de toutes parts le vieux moule de l'alexandrin; mais il restait encore beaucoup à faire. [...] Le livre de M. Wilhem Ténint, comme il le dit lui-même, ne fera pas un poète; mais s'il faisait quelques versificateurs, ce serait déjà un assez beau résultat; il servira surtout à prouver aux gens du monde que l'école romantique ne procède pas à l'aventure; et ces vers brisés en apparence exigent de longs travaux, de patient combinaisons, sont plus riches de rimes, plus sobres d'inversions et de licences grammaticales que les vers qu'ils s'imaginent d'être des chefs-d'oeuvre de pureté, parce qu'ils sont tout simplement monotones. (49-52)

By a rather bizarre contradiction, the men who pretend to classicism in opposing the caesuras and enjambments of Romantic verse do not perceive that they are imitations of Greek and Latin poets, the object of their exclusive admiration; thus, André Chenier, that anthology bee, is full of broken lines, just like Ronsard and the poets of the Pléiade, who knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart, and wrote fluently in all meters in the language of Homer and Virgil. [...] Already Lamartine with his grand wing-strokes, his elegant entanglements like flowering creepers, his generous periods, his vast sheets of verse flooding like the rivers of America have burst open the ancient oyster of the Alexandrine; but there remains much to be done. [...] Mr. Wilhem Ténint's book, as he says himself, will not make a poet; but if it makes some versifiers, that will be a good enough result; it will serve above all to prove to the world that the Romantic school does not proceed haphazardly; and these apparently broken lines demand extensive work, patient combinations, are richer in rhyme, more sober in inversions and grammatical liberties than the verses which they imagine to be masterpieces of purity, because they are merely monotones.

This excerpt shows the extent to which Ténint's work was seen as a partisan tool, one explicitly produced as a theoretical justification of Romanticism; it is tempting to suggest that this unabashed and exclusive partisanship was partly responsible for the unwillingness of readers to repose much faith in it. It is important to remember that even though the *Prosodie* did receive stamps of approval from Hugo, Deschamps, Banville,

Gautier, and a few other Romantic poets and critics, these endorsements have a rather perfunctory quality. Even its champions do not respect it much.

We can also see in the above excerpt that the chief tactic in Gautier's and Ténint's project of justification is a reference to history, specifically to the classically-trained humanist poets of the Renaissance. In a way such a tactic was paradoxical, because we can see that Gautier is above all defending the right of contemporary literature to be contemporary. To exist at all, it seems. His commitment is to the present and future of French literature: "There remains much to be done," he writes, perpetually inviting his audience to help him do it. Ténint's prescriptivism operates with the same invitational rhetoric. Yet rather than rejecting the idea of historical models--rather than claiming an exclusive or even primary allegiance to "the new"--Gautier, Ténint, and the Romantic school in general merely maintain their right to choose slightly different models than those held up for their emulation and to choose what form their emulation shall take. We can see, therefore, how important it was to the Romantics to excavate Renaissance models, and we can see how this exigency could have led to an over-enthusiastic archaeology in the case of the villanelle. But they were the bones of a pigeon, not a pterodactyl.

Siegel produces evidence that Ténint, in 1851, was placed under house arrest "pour fait de pederastie" ("for committing pederasty").<sup>45</sup> Ténint thereafter left Paris for Sweden, where he pursued a literary career under the name Louis Guillaume Ténint, eventually translating French works into Swedish and Swedish works into French. This piece of history probably also helps to explain why Ténint and his works were so quickly

forgotten; almost all trace of him disappeared from French annals after 1851.

Even the Society of Men of Letters apparently destroyed their records of Ténint's membership.<sup>46</sup> Ténint's story also suggests certain parallels with the sexually scandalous careers of Wilde and Swinburne; Wilde wrote villanelles in the eighteen-eighties, as Swinburne might have done had he not chosen social and literary retirement in 1879. Ténint did not, therefore, succeed in making a name for himself in Paris--or at least not a name he might have chosen--but his work did have some effect.

### **Théodore de Banville**

Ténint's *Prosodie* might still be worth ignoring today had not Théodore de Banville been involved in its production. In 1844, Banville was another young man of talent making a name for himself in the journals; he was even younger than Ténint, being only twenty to Ténint's thirty-one. It was he who germinated the seed that Ténint planted. The handwriting evidence showing that Banville edited Ténint's work becomes very important in the context of the history of the villanelle, because otherwise the 1845 poem "Villanelle de Buloz" would seem to have risen out of thin air. Banville's "Villanelle de Buloz" was published in the journal *Silhouette* in October of 1845 to hilariously commemorate editor François Buloz's loss of the writer Paulin Limayrac from the staff of the haughty *Revue des Deux Mondes* ("giving them the chance to say something a little malicious about their enemy while you show off," comments Delphine de Girardin). Banville published many triolets and chansons and rondeaus in the same sniping vein in this period, and he republished them all under his own name years later (they had been

anonymous before, though no doubt his authorship was well-enough known) in the 1857 *Odes funambulesques* ("Tightrope-Walking Odes").

"Villanelle de Buloz" is so specific an imitation of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" that some have called it a parody, though in my view this is not exactly the right term.

But the debt is obvious:

J'ai perdu mon Limayrac:  
Ce coup-là me bouleverse  
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac.

Il va mener en cornac  
La *Gazette du Commerce*.  
J'ai perdu mon Limayrac.

Mon Limayrac sur Balzac  
Savait seul pleuvoir à verse.  
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac.

Pour ses bons mots d'almanach  
On tombait à la renverse.  
J'ai perdu mon Limayrac.

Sans son habile micmac  
Sainte-Beuve tergiverse.  
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac.

Il a pris son havresac,  
Et j'ai pris la fièvre tierce.  
J'ai perdu mon Limayrac.

A fumer, sans nul tabac  
Depuis ce jour je m'exerce.  
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac.

Pleurons, et vous de cognac  
Mettez une pièce en perce!  
J'ai perdu mon Limayrac,  
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac! (*Odes 24*)

I have lost my Limayrac  
 This blow oversets me quite.  
 I would clothe me in a sack.

He's going (like an elephant driver) to manage  
 The *Gazette of Commerce*.  
 I have lost my Limayrac.

My Limayrac, writing about Balzac,  
 Always knew how to pour it on.  
 I would clothe me in a sack.

His quips from the almanac  
 Would make you fall over.  
 I have lost my Limayrac.

Without his clever goings-on  
 Sainte-Beuve will get lazy.  
 I would clothe me in a sack.

He has taken his haversack,  
 And I have taken my third fever.  
 I have lost my Limayrac.

Since that day I've been training myself  
 To smoke without any tobacco.  
 I would clothe me in a sack.

Let's all weep, and drink cognac--  
 And put something sharp in!  
 I have lost my Limayrac,  
 I would clothe me in a sack!

It is exceedingly appropriate that this silly poem--the true progenitor of the contemporary villanelle--is so steeped in the quotidian quarrels of the nineteenth-century Parisian reviews, because it was exactly that hurried and contentious environment that fostered the error that the villanelle was a fixed form. The reason I would not call it a parody of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" is that the butt of the joke is not Passerat's lyric; rather, it is Buloz and Limayrac and their whole stuffy literary practice and philosophy.

Knowledge of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" helps a reader get the joke, and such knowledge was basically only available to a reader of Ténint's *Prosodie*. That Banville imitated Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" in this poem is not, to my mind, an indication that all of Paris in 1845 would have recognized the imitation's source; rather, it is a trick in keeping with both Banville's precocious parading of specialized knowledge and the general Romantic insistence on adopting new models. "If you don't get the joke, it's because you don't know enough," suggests Banville. The form is a rhinestone bludgeon. Clive Scott also suggests that the "heckling" quality of the double-refrain villanelle is tonally highly apposite to Banville's satiric intention (*French Verse-Art* 159). The same, of course, is true for the rondeau and the triolet, whose repetitions Banville also exploited for an effect of gleeful taunting.

Banville continued to disseminate the villanelle in the years before his *Petit traité* appeared. Banville published a second *Silhouette* villanelle in June of 1846, "Villanelle à Mademoiselle \*\*\*, " and this, like "Villanelle de Buloz," was reprinted in the 1857 *Odes funambulesques*. A third villanelle by Banville, "Villanelle des pauvres housseurs," appeared in *Figaro* in December of 1858. Almost ten years later, in 1867, a sometime poet and dramatist named Philoxène Boyer published a villanelle titled "La Marquise Aurore" in his largely disregarded book of poetry *Les deux saisons* ("The Two Seasons"). Banville had collaborated with Boyer on a play titled "Le Cousin du roi" ("The King's Cousin") in 1857, and "La Marquise Aurore" was probably written around 1857; it is dedicated to Marie Rivet, the daughter of alienist Brierre de Boismont, and the height of Boyer's acquaintance with Rivet dates from that year. "Le Cousin du roi" premiered on



Saturday, April 4, 1857, and Boyer's wedding breakfast was held at the house of Marie Rivet on Thursday, April 16, 1857. (There was a good bit of comment about the fact that Boyer had chosen to hold his wedding breakfast at what amounted to a private insane asylum; Marie Rivet was an advocate for the insane, and her home was open to them. Along with the mental patients, those present at Boyer's nuptial celebration included Banville, Sainte-Beuve, and Flaubert.)<sup>47</sup> The obvious conclusion is that in 1857 Banville and Boyer were discussing and experimenting with the villanelle as defined by Ténint; these discussions probably also produced Banville's 1858 "Villanelle des pauvres housseurs," which was significantly later than his two previous villanelles. All four of these villanelles exceed nineteen lines, treating the villanelle as a stanza type rather than as a fixed form, and they are the only nineteenth-century villanelles that can be found before Banville's *Petit traité de poésie française* appeared in 1872.

The section on the villanelle in the *Petit traité* makes no mention of the (nonexistent) history of the form, not even to mention "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"; the sole example that Banville cites is Boyer's "La Marquise Aurore" of 1867. As is usual with poetry handbooks today, the villanelle is grouped with (presumably) authentic medieval and Renaissance forms: the rondel, ballade, envoi, sonnet, rondeau, rondeau redoublé, triolet, lai, virelai, and chant royal (Banville does not mention the Italian sestina), and the weight of tradition behind these forms lends tradition to the villanelle. The chapter on traditional fixed-form poems begins with a hasty few sentences of endorsement:

J'ai nommé *poèmes traditionnels à forme fixe* ceux qui pour lesquels la tradition a irrévocablement fixé le nombre de vers qu'ils doivent contenir et l'ordre dans lequel ces vers doivent être disposés. Ce groupe de poèmes est l'un de nos plus précieux trésors, car chacun d'eux forme un tout rythmique, complet et parfait, et en même temps ils ont la grâce naïve et comme inconsciente des créations qu'ont faites les époques primitives. Je me hâte de les passer en revue et je commence par le RONDEL . . . (185)

I have called "traditional poems of fixed form" those for which tradition has irrevocably fixed the number of lines they must contain and the order in which these lines must be arranged. This group of poems is one of our most precious treasures, for each of them makes a formal whole, complete and perfect, and at the same time they have the naïve unconscious grace of the creations that marked the primitive epochs. I hasten to review them and I begin with the RONDEL . . .

This example illustrates the extent to which the chapter is merely descriptive and prescriptive, alluding to history only insofar as it supports the idyllic post-Romantic tableau of "naïve grace." With regard to the individual forms, Banville is necessarily a little more explicit as to their precise history, but the chief part of every entry is devoted to explaining exactly how the forms are constructed rather than to an exploration of their provenance.

In the entry on the villanelle, Banville also takes the opportunity to laud the largely disregarded work of Boyer, who had died in 1867 shortly after the publication of *Les deux saisons*, his sole volume of lyrics. Andrew Lang in his 1891 *Essays in Little* called Boyer "a generous but indiscreet patron of singers. . . . The memory of M. Boyer's enthusiasm for poetry and his amiable hospitality are not unlikely to survive both his compositions and those in which M. De Banville aided him" (41). Banville, always a loyal partisan, defends and promotes the work of his friend with characteristically cavalier hyperbole:

Si la muse Érato possède quelque part un petit Dunkerke (au XIXe siècle, tout est possible!), la Villanelle est le plus ravissant de ses bijoux d'étagère. En voici une, tortillée de main de maître, et dont l'auteur a été un des poètes le plus organisés et les plus érudits de notre époque. Hélas! il n'a laissé que des prémisses, et des témoins irrécusables de son génie!  
[Full text of "La Marquise Aurore."] (215)

If the muse Erato owns somewhere a small Dunkirk (in the nineteenth century, anything is possible!), the villanelle is the most ravishing of her shelved jewels. And here is one, twisted by the hand of a master, whose author was one of the most methodical and most erudite of our epoch. Alas! He has left nothing but some lodgings, and some unimpeachable witnesses of his genius!<sup>48</sup>

Again we see that the primary motivation in the dissemination of the villanelle in the nineteenth century is post-Romantic campaigning, however sincere it may have been. Boyer, incidentally, like Ténint--and everyone--worshipped Hugo from afar, and had commenced *Les deux saisons* with lyrics dedicated to the master.

Prescriptive and promotional, the entry in Banville's treatise continues with a lengthy textual description of the principles of the villanelle. Of interest is that Banville specifies and reiterates that the first and third lines of every tercet should employ feminine rhyme, while the second line of every tercet should employ masculine rhyme. Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" follows this order, but Banville himself had adopted the opposite order in "Villanelle de Buloz," with the first and third lines of every tercet being masculine ("micmac" / "sac") and the second line of every tercet being feminine ("tergiverse"). English poets, too, would soon ignore this rule (which did not appear in Ténint); Edmund Gosse's "Wouldst thou not be content to die," whether deliberately or not, like "Villanelle de Buloz" uses feminine rhyme in the second line of each tercet rather than in the first and third. Banville concludes with another highly decorative image of the form: "Et rien n'est plus chatoyant que ce petit poème. On dirait une tresse formée de fils argent et d'or, que traverse un troisième fil, couleur de rose!" (215) ("And nothing is more sparkling than this little form. One might say that it is a plait woven from strands of silver and gold, through which winds a third strand the color of a rose!") Banville simultaneously trivializes and beautifies the form, emphasizing its charm, its beauty, as though these save it from the taint of seriousness or utility.

Convincing evidence that any part of Banville's *Petit traité* directly influenced the major French poets is lacking, although Alvin Harms argues that the work "in its fundamental ideas was ahead of its time and deserves to be taken more seriously as a document in the history of Symbolism" (168). But the work was undeniably successful from a publisher's point of view. First printed as a series of articles in the periodical *Echo de la Sorbonne* in 1871-2, the *Petit traité* was published by the *Librairie de l'Echo de la Sorbonne* in a separate volume in 1872. A revised edition was published in 1875, still under the auspices of the periodical. Further editions were then published by the house of Charpentier in 1881, 1883, 1884, 1888, 1894, 1899, 1903, 1909, 1915, 1922, and 1935 and by Lemerre in 1891, the year of Banville's death; there are also two recent reprints.<sup>49</sup> Fuchs suggests that the work had been intended for a school textbook, and it may have been used for this purpose despite the roguish parodies of pedagogy in such moments as when Banville discourses upon the topic of poetic license:

Supposons donc que vous n'êtes pas né poète, et que vous voulez cependant faire des vers. Une telle supposition n'a rien d'improbable et nous pouvons même dire qu'elle se trouve chaque jour réalisée. Pénétrez-vous d'abord de l'esprit et de la letter du chapitre intitulé *Licenses poétiques*; je l'écris spécialement à votre usage.

#### LICENCES POÉTIQUES.

Il n'y en a pas. (63)

Let us suppose that you were not born a poet, and that you want nevertheless to write verse. Such a supposition has nothing improbable about it, and we can even say that it is proved to happen every day. First, enter into the spirit and the letter of the chapter entitled "Poetic Licenses"; I write it especially for your use.

#### POËTIC LICENSES.

There are none.

Examples like this illustrate that the work is programmatically opposed to high seriousness in all matters except those purely arbitrary, i.e., the game of versification. Banville's interest in "the rules" has all the obsessive intensity of the fanatic gamer's, and he is perfectly aware of this, and enjoys the flamboyant performance of that role.

Banville thus strives to keep poetry non-utilitarian--a goal he indeed shared with the Symbolists, though Mallarmé and Baudelaire (who did express admiration for Banville) were perhaps wiser in choosing abstractions such as image and sound rather than a concrete and historicized form as their aloof and arbitrary goddess. Again, we see that one characteristic of the post-Romantic movement was that it did not reject historical models, claiming instead a better right to them than their reactionary neoclassical rivals.

### **Edmund Gosse and Austin Dobson**

Two poets undoubtedly influenced by Banville's *Petit traité* were Edmund Gosse and Austin Dobson. In a 1922 memorial essay upon the death of Dobson, Gosse

remembered that their long friendship had begun in 1874 with a mutual enthusiasm for Banville's *Petit traité*:

The late Radical politician, Mr Peter Taylor, for many years M. P. for Leicester, lived in a large house, surrounded by gardens on Campden Hill--Aubrey House, long ago destroyed. Here he and his gifted wife entertained on a considerable scale, and hither came many persons of romantic and exotic interest. Mazzini was among those who had haunted Aubrey House at an earlier time. He was a correspondent of a Pen and Pencil Club inaugurated by Mrs Peter Taylor, whose members met on stated occasions to read and exhibit to one another prose and verse, and drawings also, illustrating a theme suggested for each occasion by the amiable hostess. Mr and Mrs Taylor liked to encourage ingenuous youth, and I had the honour of being elected to the Pen and Pencil Club. I attended the meeting in April 1874, when I was gratified by seeing and hearing several persons more or less notorious in their day. I knew no one in the room, nor was the quality of the successive contributions of a very exciting character. But in due course a slim young man, with dark eyes beneath a fine Horatian forehead, rose and read a short piece, in a voice attractive in its modesty and distinction. This, a whisper told me, was Mr Austin Dobson, whose 'Vignettes in Rhyme' had recently attracted a good deal of attention and were believed to have been rewarded by an Olympian nod from the Laureate [Tennyson]. As it happily chanced, I had just read that volume, with juvenile enthusiasm. But what greatly moved me was that I recognised (I alone, no doubt!) that the piece just read was a rondeau in the French form elaborately defined by Théodore de Banville in the 1874 reprint of his 'Petit Traité de la Poésie Française,' a book which--as we ultimately discovered--was exercising a remarkable influence over several young English poets. The company presently dispersed, and I shyly ventured to address the author of the rondeau with the remark that I noticed he had kept to the rules of De Banville. He was extremely surprised, and I may dare to say extremely pleased. We wandered out into the night together, and, late as it was, we paced the streets in a kind of dream for hours, absorbed in our metrical discussions. (Gosse, "Austin Dobson," 63-4)

Gosse might have the date of this meeting wrong--I can find no 1874 reprint of Banville's *Petit traité*, though there is one dated 1875; more likely, Gosse and Dobson had simply read the first edition of 1872--but what is most important about the passage is the scene it sets. It is clear that the "elaborately defined" Renaissance forms perform a social function

for Gosse similar to the social function they performed for Banville: for both, enthusiasm for the forms is a specialized knowledge that credentials the ambitious young *littérateur*, defining him as akin to but different from the established elder lions in their large houses surrounded by gardens. The friendship between Gosse and Dobson resembled, we may imagine, the friendship of Banville and Ténint and/or the friendship of Banville and Boyer: all were friendships founded on meeting in the *salons*, discussing the latest literature of the day, reading and editing one another's work in private, and ultimately advertising and endorsing that work in public. It is in this way that new literary schools have always arisen; when Gosse writes that his recognition of Dobson's rondeau "greatly moved me," what he is moved toward is a movement--exclusive, but no longer forlornly singular.

Both Gosse and Dobson soon communicated their discovery of the "French forms" to an English audience, Gosse in an 1877 essay in the *Cornhill Magazine* titled "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" and Dobson in an 1878 essay less beseechingly titled "A Note on Some Foreign Forms of Verse," which was appended to the anthology *Latter-Day Lyrics*.<sup>50</sup> Certainly the new movement then forming in the hands of Gosse and Dobson had as one of its mainsprings the admiration for the exotic, the foreign; this is also evident in the passage above, in which Gosse's admiration for the romantic Italian insurgent Giuseppe Mazzini (who died in 1872) seems to be an expectation that is rewarded by his meeting with the "slim young man, with dark eyes." Dobson and Gosse themselves come to represent--indeed, seek to represent--the foreign and the exotic for their British public.



Gosse's "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" is an important piece in the villanelle's history, marking as it does the kindling of the form in nineteenth-century Anglophone poetry. Gosse begins by arguing that poetry is more a fine art than a philosophy, and goes on to assert that therefore "it need not surprise us to have to dismiss the purely spontaneous and untutored expression of it as of little else than historical interest" (53). (We remember Banville's refusal to grant poetic licenses.) Gosse cites the Petrarchan sonnet as a flourishing example of a form in which "the severity of the plan and the rich and copious recurrence of the rhyme serve the double end of repelling the incompetent workman and stimulating the competent," and therefore feels at liberty to recommend six "exotic forms which it seems desirable to adopt into English poetry" (56). These six forms are the *rondel*, the *rondeau*, the *triolet*, the *villanelle*, the *ballade*, and the *chant royal*. His chief authority for the history of the villanelle is Banville. Gosse sees the *rondel*, *rondeau*, and *triolet* as inescapably "light" forms, while the *villanelle*, the *ballade*, and the *chant royal* "are usually wedded to serious or stately expression, and almost demand a vein of pathos" (57). Gosse of course reprints Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" as an example of the villanelle, little knowing that it is the *only* early example of that reputedly fixed form, though he does write (in a slightly puzzled tone), "I do not find that much has been recorded of [the villanelle's] history, but it dates back at least as far as the fifteenth century" (64). Of Passerat's poem, he writes, "This dear dove of Passerat's seems to me quite as sweet as Lesbia's sparrow, and such a pretty grief is worthily enshrined in such a dainty form"--a sentence whose adjectives seem to contradict the earlier comment that the villanelle could be "serious or stately" (65).

Gosse also offers his own "Wouldst thou not be content to die" as an example, writing that "In English I do not think any have yet been printed, except one by the present writer, published in 1874 in the *Athenaeum*. In the dearth of examples, I may perhaps be pardoned if I quote here another which has not hitherto seen the light" (65). This earlier villanelle of Gosse's has not been found, and may not exist: I have conducted an unsuccessful search for it in the journals Gosse was known to have contributed to in the period from 1872 to 1876: the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Spectator*, *The Cornhill Magazine*, *The Academy*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *The Athenaeum*, and *The Examiner*.<sup>51</sup> A previously unknown villanelle signed by Austin Dobson, however, appears in the October 24, 1874 issue of *The Examiner*:

VILLANELLE.

When I first saw your eyes,  
 You were then but a child:  
 Time changes, Time tries.

You were pure from disguise;  
 O the deeps undefiled,  
 When I first saw your eyes!

Now your hand is a prize,  
 Now your heart is beguiled;  
 Time changes, Time tries.

You have learned to despise,  
 Not as now had you smiled,  
 When I first saw your eyes.

You are cold, you are wise;  
 Yet you were but a child  
 When I first saw your eyes.  
 Time changes, Time tries! (1157)

The subject and the versification of the *Examiner* villanelle are virtually the same as that of "When I Saw You Last, Rose," a villanelle of Dobson's published in his 1877 collection *Proverbs in Porcelain*: the concluding quatrain of that piece runs, "Is it Cupid? Who knows! / Yet you used not to sigh, / When I saw you last, Rose; / How fast the time goes!" Of some interest is the fact that Dobson's "When I first saw your eyes," now the earliest known English villanelle, follows Banville's stanzaic model. As Clive Scott has pointed out, the nineteen-line Passerat model would not come to be the norm for Anglophone poets until after the publication of Boulmier's *Villanelles* in 1878, while French poets even after that date (Rollinat, Leconte de Lisle) still tended to regard the villanelle as a stanza type rather than a fixed form.<sup>52</sup>

Gosse's "Wouldst thou not be content to die," included with his plea for exotic forms, was similarly stanzaic at twenty-five lines:

Wouldst thou not be content to die  
 When low-hung fruit is hardly clinging,  
 And golden Autumn passes by?

If we could vanish, thou and I,  
 While the last woodland bird is singing,  
 Wouldst thou not be content to die?

Deep drifts of leaves in the forest lie,  
 Red vintage that the frost is flinging,  
 And golden Autumn passes by.

Beneath this delicate rose-gray sky,  
 While sunset bells are faintly ringing,  
 Wouldst thou not be content to die?

For wintry webs of mist on high  
 Out of the muffled earth are springing,  
 And golden Autumn passes by.

O now when pleasures fade and fly,  
 And Hope her southward flight is winging,  
 Wouldst thou not be content to die?

Lest Winter come, with wailing cry,  
 His cruel icy bondage bringing,  
 When golden Autumn has passed by,

And thou, with many a tear and sigh,  
 While life her wasted hands is wringing,  
 Shalt pray in vain for leave to die  
 When golden Autumn has passed by.

A bare two years later, after the publication of Boulmier's *Villanelles*, Gosse would excise the second and third stanzas from the poem, though it retained its eight stanzas when reprinted in *Latter-Day Lyrics*, the anthology of 1878 to which Dobson appended his "Note on Some Foreign Forms of Verse."<sup>53</sup> Neither Dobson nor Gosse obeyed Banville's rule for the use of feminine and masculine rhyme (though Gosse does employ feminine rhyme in the second line of the tercet rather than in the first and third lines), nor did Gosse mention this rule in his essay. Dobson's early villanelles are in trimeter, while Gosse chooses tetrameter, early evidence that the villanelle was understood to have no particular meter. Nineteenth-century villanelles, however, avoid pentameter in favor of shorter lines, doubtless because of the influence of the French examples with their seven-syllable masculine lines.

Gosse was notoriously inaccurate about more than just the point of whether he or Dobson had published the first villanelle in English, more than just the point of whether there was more than one example of the form in the Renaissance. In the fall of 1886, in what Gosse's biographer Ann Thwaite calls "the central episode of Edmund Gosse's literary career," the critic John Churton Collins attacked Gosse's *From Shakespeare to*

*Pope* for its unscholarliness (277). "We have even refrained from discussing matters of opinion," wrote Collins in the widely-read *Quarterly Review* piece. "We have confined ourselves entirely to matters of fact--to gross and palpable blunders, to unfounded and reckless assertions, to such absurdities in criticism and such vices of style as will in the eyes of discerning readers carry with them their own condemnation" (qtd. in Thwaite 282). Gosse was just about to take up the position of Clark Lecturer at Cambridge when the denunciation appeared. It was the Sokal scandal of its time, shocking, much-talked of, and much-written of in academic and literary circles. Thwaite writes, "There is no question that Collins was a fanatic and a pedant. Later in life he would search the registers of forty-two Norwich churches, trying to pin down the elusive birth-date of Robert Greene for an edition he was editing. But, as far as Gosse's book was concerned, Collins happened to be right. . . . *From Shakespeare to Pope* is full of extraordinary mistakes" (278). Gosse's career did survive the blow--he took up his position as scheduled--but his reputation as a scholar was never the same. His translations, too, came in for criticism; in 1891 William Archer wrote in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that Gosse's translation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* was "inconceivably careless" and "fantastically inaccurate" (qtd. in Thwaite 341). Henry James remarked upon the occasion in a letter that Gosse "*has* a genius for inaccuracy which makes it difficult to dress his wounds" (emphasis original, qtd. in Thwaite 339).

Despite the charges of unscholarly carelessness that persisted throughout his career, Gosse retained more than enough authority to write the entry on the villanelle for the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. There are many differences between

the text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" printed in the 1877 "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" and that printed in the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The version of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" of 1877 was riddled with errors, many of them highly ungrammatical, and while these might have been due to printer error rather than to Gosse's poor French, Gosse strove to correct them for his 1911 reference-work article. (See Appendix III for a textual collation, and see Appendix IV to compare the full texts of the versions discussed below side by side.) For instance, the 1877 article prints "regrette" rather than Passerat's "regretes"--a rather serious mistake, since one of the easier and more consistent rules of French conjugation is that present-tense verbs conjugated for "tu" end in "s." Four other scholars (two French-speaking and two English-speaking) would later "correct" Passerat's spelling to the incorrect "regrètes," but this mistake is more understandable, since many French verbs ending in "-ter" are indeed spelled that way in the "tu" form (e.g., "acheter" becomes "achètes"). In the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, as in most modernized versions of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," the correct modern spelling, "regrettes," is used. The 1877 article also prints entirely non-existent French words--"fermi" for "ferme" and "joy" for "foy"--and introduces a jarring and fictitious exclamation point in the final quatrain (an interpolation picked up by seven subsequent scholars). Gosse corrects these mistakes in his 1911 piece, and in addition attempts to make his modernizations more consistent, for instance modernizing "J'ay" to "J'ai" for the first time. The source of Gosse's 1877 text of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" is unclear; the text of that poem had not appeared in Banville, so Gosse must have tracked down the single Renaissance example elsewhere. Gosse's highly

corrupt text of 1877 cannot be traced to any of the prior known sources through collation. The source of the 1911 text, however, cited by Gosse and verified by textual collation, is Joseph Boulmier's 1878/9 *Villanelles, suivies de poésies en langage du XVe siècle, et précédées d'une notice historique et critique sur la villanelle avec une villanelle technique*.<sup>54</sup>

## Joseph Boulmier

Joseph Boulmier's *Villanelles* has always been puzzling: it seems so decidedly the work of someone outside literary and scholarly circles that it is difficult to attribute to it any serious influence on those circles. In one sense Gosse could hardly have consulted a worse source for an authoritative reference text such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; Boulmier had few literary or scholarly credentials, though he does seem to have been a bibliophile and book collector. It is likely that he owned a copy of the 1606 *Recueil* in which Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"; he certainly seems to have been the first nineteenth-century admirer of the villanelle to consult it.

Boulmier was as dedicated a Parisian, at least in his youth, as his contemporary Banville; he was born in Burgundy in 1821, which made him three years older than Banville. Boulmier had published six books before his *Villanelles*, three of them privately published: *Jehan le brave, ou, La bataille de Poitiers, épisode national: lu en séance publique le 22 décembre 1844* ("Jehan the Brave, or, The Battle of Poitiers, National Episode: Read in Public Session the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1844") (Poitiers: Imprimerie de F.-A. Saurin, 1845); *Estienne Dolet, sa vie, ses oeuvres, son martyre, Études sur le*

seizième siècle ("Etienne Dolet: His Life, His Works, His Martyrdom," Studies on the Seventeenth Century) (Paris, A. Aubry: Libraires de la Société des Bibliophiles françois, 1857); *Rimes loyales* ("Loyal Rhymes") (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et De Broise, 1857); *Portefeuille intime* ("Intimate Portfolio") (Paris: L'auteur, 1864); *Rimes brutales* ("Brutal Rhymes") (Paris: L'auteur, 1864); and *Rimes chevaleresques* ("Chivalrous Rhymes") (Paris: L'auteur, 1868; Laine, 1871). McFarland also reports that Boulmier "collaborated with Adolphe Royannez in writing a historical verse drama on Francis Villon in 1865 and with Eugene Vignon in a one-act verse drama, *L'Aveugle*, in 1879" (49). Boulmier's first two works in particular indicate that he shared the interest in the Renaissance that was so current with Ténint and others in the middle of the eighteen-forties, although they are prose histories rather than poetry. Etienne Dolet was a printer, which additionally indicates Boulmier's interest in printing, publishing, and book history.

Boulmier appeared as a character called "Boulmier" in *Le Bachelier* ("The Bachelor"), which was the second volume of a triple-decker fictionalized autobiography by yet another contributor to the Parisian journals, Jules Vallès. Boulmier does not appear in any French biographical dictionary that I can find, so relying on Vallès's very lightly disguised fiction is perhaps allowable. Vallès reports that Boulmier was "un de nos anciennes camarades de l'hôtel Lisbonne" ("one of our old comrades from the Hotel Lisbon") and that, circa 1855, he worked "comme correcteur chez Firmin Didot" ("as a proofreader at Firmin Didot") (314). Firmin Didot published chiefly reference and scholarly works, including, as it happens, one of the mammoth biographical dictionaries in which Boulmier himself does not appear.<sup>55</sup> Vallès's biographer, Roger Bellet, writes



that Vallès at that time "compte sur Joseph Boulmier pour accéder au milieu fécond qu'on appelait 'bohème littéraire' " ("counted on Joseph Boulmier for access to that fecund milieu known as 'literary Bohemia' ") (136-7). Boulmier would have been about thirty-four in that year of 1855; Vallès was about twenty-three.

Boulmier's outline of the false history of the villanelle deserves to be quoted at length, certainly for its breezily overbearing tone:

J'arrive au moment où l'histoire de la villanelle devient tout à fait curieuse.

Un beau jour, après avoir parlé successivement du rondeau, du triolet, de la ballade, du lai, du virelai, du chant royal, l'auteur de je ne sais plus quel traité de versification, bâclé à la diable comme ils le sont à peu près tous, abordant à la fin la villanelle, eut l'idée, ou plutôt la chance, de citer comme modèle de ce dernier genre, -- en quoi du reste il n'avait pas tort, -- un certain naïf chef-d'oeuvre échappée, Dieu sait comme, à la plume du savant Passerat.

Bien que je l'insère plus loin, en tête de mon humble volume, comme on ne sera pas fâché, j'en suis sur, de le savourer deux fois, je me hasarde à la placer encore ici: [...]

La tourterelle de Passerat une fois lancée dans la circulation, qu'arriva-t-il? Tous les traités de versification qui se succédèrent et se copièrent "à la queue leu leu," escortent telle ou telle grammaire, tel ou tel dictionnaire de rimes, ne manquèrent pas de la ramener en scène, et surtout de la présenter comme un type dont il était absolument interdit de s'écarter.

J'en connais même qui ont été jusqu'à en donner ainsi la recette: "La villanelle se fait sur deux rimes, l'une en *elle* et l'autre en *oi*."

C'était raisonner en *oie*, calembour à part. Après cela, suivant l'expression vulgaire, on n'a plus qu'à tirer l'échelle.

Eh bien! je le déclare sans crainte: on peut, comme je l'ai fait moi-même, feuilleter l'un après l'autre tous les traités de versification du quinzième et du seizième siècle; on n'y trouvera pas la moindre trace de la tourterelle de Passerat, c'est-à-dire rien qui ressemble à ce joli rythme.

I come to the moment where the history of the villanelle becomes altogether curious.

One fine day, after having spoken successively of the rondeau, of the triolet, of the ballade, of the lai, of the virelai, of the chant royal, the author of I no longer know which treatise on versification, bungled to hell like they almost always are, finally tackled the villanelle, having the idea,

or perhaps the luck, to cite as a model of this last genre--and after all he wasn't wrong--a certain naïve masterpiece escaped, God knows how, from the pen of the scholar Passerat.

Although I include it later, at the head of my humble volume, as no one will be angry, I am sure, to savor it a second time, I will hazard to place it again here: [...]

The turtledove of Passerat once launched into circulation, what happened to it? All the treatises on versification that succeeded one another and copied one another in single file, accompanying this or that grammar, this or that rhyming dictionary, did not fail to drag it back on the scene, and especially to present it as a type from which it was absolutely forbidden to depart.

I even know some that have gone so far as to give the formula thus: "The villanelle is fashioned on two rhymes, one 'elle' and the other 'oi.' "

This was reasoning like a goose, pun aside. After that, to use the vulgar expression, you can't do anything but knock their legs out from under them.

Well, I say it without fear: you can, as I have done myself, page through all the essays on versification from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, one after another; you will not find there the least trace of Passerat's turtledove, which is to say nothing that resembles this lovely form.

Boulmier's tone is a couple of degrees more colloquial than most essays on poetics, but it is a fair sample of the brash contentiousness of journalistic Paris in the late nineteenth century. Boulmier quotes the Berthelin essay in the rhyming dictionary attributed to Richelet, misreading (as I argue in the first chapter) that terse and ambiguous passage so that the phrase "ce poëme" ("this poem") means a poem *type* and not an individual poem, "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," in which case the Richelet rhyming dictionary would indeed have to be understood as issuing the exacting edict decreeing the precise rhyme sound of the villanelle.<sup>56</sup> There is a real possibility that the French pun on the rhyme sound "oi" and the word "oie" ("goose") is also a bilingual slam at Gosse, who had to endure many puns on Gosse/goose/gosling throughout his career--but this is only speculation.

Gosse, in any event, did not retreat wholly from the assertions he had made in the 1877 "A Plea For Certain Exotic Forms of Verse," though he did acknowledge Boulmier in his article on the villanelle for the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Gosse concedes that there were no schematic double-refrain villanelles before Passerat, yet (like Boulmier himself) he does not conclude that it was he and his contemporaries who were most responsible for defining the modern form of the villanelle:

VILLANELLE, a form of verse, originally loose in construction, but since the 16th century bound in exact limits of an arbitrary kind. . . . It appears, indeed, to have been by an accident that the special and rigorously defined form of the villanelle was invented. In the posthumous poems of Jean Passerat (1534-1602), which were printed in 1606, several villanelles were discovered, in different forms. One of these became, and has remained, so deservedly popular, that it has given its exact character to the subsequent history of the villanelle. This famous poem runs as follows . . . This exquisite lyric has continued to be the type of its class, and the villanelle, therefore, for the last three hundred years has been a poem, written in tercets, on two rhymes, the first and the third line being repeated alternatively in each tercet. (73-4)

Gosse cites no examples on the Passerat model in the three hundred years he mentions, yet seems to assume that there must be some prior to his own and Banville's attempts. Boulmier, of course, had not assigned a date for the fine day on which Passerat's "J'ay

perdu ma Tourterelle" first became a type, so the reader is free to imagine that the event had taken place rather longer ago than it had. Boulmier blames the authors of treatises on versification for the error, but despite the forcefulness of his declarations to the effect that he did not believe the double-refrain villanelle was a fixed form, he himself probably contributed at least as much if not more to the insistence of the error through composing so many poems in that form.

Interestingly, the more it seemed as though someone had blundered, the more the post-Romantics insisted upon the objective excellence of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," which they had so hastily and assiduously imitated. Gosse calls the poem "dainty" in 1877 and "exquisite" in 1911. Boulmier exhibits an almost cultish admiration for the poem in his *Villanelles*, but exhibits an equally fervent antipathy to the rest of Passerat's poetry: "God knows how" the scholar produced "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle." After the passage quoted above, Boulmier goes on to reprint the second poem titled "Villanelle" in Passerat's 1606 *Recueil*. This is a poem of five stanzas in quatrains that begins "Qui en sa fantasie / Loge la jalousie, / Bientost cocu sera, / Et ne s'en sauuera" ("Who in his mind / Lodges jealousy / Will soon be a cuckold / And will not save himself") with the two-line refrain altering by the poem's end to "Bientost cornu sera, / Et ne s'en sauuera" ("Will soon be horned / And will not save himself"). Boulmier seems disgusted by this poem, calling it "une grosse 'gauloiserie' " ("an arrant bawdiness"), and asserts that it cannot come close to the turtledove villanelle, "la vraie, la bonne" ("the true one, the worthy one") (12). It is because of the formal and substantive superiority of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," Boulmier claims, that he has adopted it as a model. This claim

need not be true. It is entirely possible that Boulmier, having written a great many villanelles on the scheme then current and wishing to publish them, discovered only after the fact that it was not an antique form. Certainly the comment he makes to the effect that he will reprint "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" a *second* time in the introduction indicates that the introduction was written after the rest of the book had been assembled; the introduction precedes the rest of the book, so that in terms of position this "second" printing of the poem is actually the first.

Boulmier is nevertheless willing to assume some responsibility for his role in prescribing the form to others; he has merely had to abandon the crutch of defending that prescription by gesturing to an existing, if forgotten, tradition. Boulmier writes, "Il serait à désirer, j'en conviens sans peine, que dorénavant cette forme si heureuse de la villanelle devînt définitive, comme l'est depuis longtemps la forme du sonnet. En ce cas, on pourrait en formuler ainsi les règles: [...] " ("It will be desirable, I have no trouble admitting, that henceforth this felicitous form of the villanelle should become definitive, as has long been the case for the form of the sonnet. In that case, one can thus formulate the rules: [...] ") (13). Boulmier proceeds to outline his scheme, which did not, at least in the case of the English villanellists, take hold. He would require the line to be seven syllables and the rhymes to alternate between masculine and feminine, though a poet may begin on either a masculine or a feminine rhyme. He does not include the nineteen-line stipulation in his rules, but he does opine in the course of his text that this is the best length, and in practice all his own villanelles were of that length. Boulmier is most insistent on the question of subject matter, writing that "En fait du style, ce qu'il faut

avant tout à la villanelle, c'est du tendre et du naïf. Les souvenirs aimés, les mirages du coeur, les divins enfantillages de l'amour, voilà son meilleur domaine" ("In terms of style, that which above all is necessary for the villanelle, is the tender and the naïve. Cherished memories, the mirages of the heart, the divine immaturities of love: these are its best domain") (17). This stylistic bias is appropriate to the villanelle because of its "origine paysanne" ("peasant origin"); Boulmier, like McFarland after him, is willing to erase the differences between the unformulated pastoral song originally designated by the term "villanelle" and the fixed poetic form. Boulmier concedes that the villanelle may sometimes be serious, but rails against the "messieurs de Parnassiens" ("Parnassian gentlemen") who would make it banal or pretentious (17).

Boulmier's *Villanelles* did earn a second printing in 1879, but on the whole the poems in that volume (which included twenty-two poems "in fifteenth-century language" not on the villanelle scheme) were not much admired, or at least not for long. The forty villanelles so closely modeled after Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" were technically proficient, however, in the sense that Boulmier adhered rigidly to the rules he had set himself and others in his introduction. Perhaps for this reason, Andrew Lang, another popularizer of the villanelle (though he preferred the ballade, of which he wrote many), included a single villanelle in his 1885 *Rhymes à la Mode*: "Villanelle (To M. Joseph Boulmier, author of 'Les Villanelles')." The villanelle seeks more villanelles by Boulmier. It begins, "Villanelle, why art thou mute? / Hath the singer ceased to sing? / Hath the Master lost his lute?" Lang's note to the poem comments, "M. BOULMIER, author of *Les Villanelles*, died shortly after this villanelle was written; he had not

published a larger collection on which he had been at work" (59). Boulmier had died in 1881 at the age of about sixty, judged a "Master" of the villanelle by Lang if by few others, but with his revelation that the villanelle was not a fixed form in the Renaissance largely disregarded or glossed over by the literary establishment.

The acutely marginal status of Boulmier's *Villanelles* is additionally confirmed by a little cursory research into its publisher, Isidore Liseux. Liseux is primarily remembered today as a publisher of erotic literature. The earliest works published by Liseux date from 1875, only three years prior to the publication of Boulmier's *Villanelles*, so Liseux was by no means an established concern in 1878; the erotica specialization seems to have come a bit later than Boulmier's *Villanelles*, but it is still suggestive. (No pun intended.) Liseux published an edition of de Sade's *Justine* in 1884 and a French edition of the *Kama Sutra* in 1885 (*Les kama sutra; manuel d'érotologie hindoue*); much of Liseux's market was clearly Anglophone, however. Liseux himself translated several French works into English: his translation of de Sade's *Opus Sadicum* appeared in 1889 and his translation of the memoirs of Casanova appeared in 1891. Liseux also republished classic English works: in 1909 came *A Night in a Moorish Harem*, reputedly written by George Herbert; and in 1911 came an edition of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*. Less well-known works in French and English published by Liseux included the following:

- *A Treatise on the Use of Flogging in Medicine and Venery Written to the Famous Christianus Cassius, Bishop of Lubeck, and Privy Councillor to the Duke of Holstein* by Johann Heinrich Meibom (1898);

- Latin and French versions of *De la sodomie et particulièrement de la sodomie des femmes distinguée du tribadisme* ("On Sodomy, and Particularly on Sodomy of Women Distinguished by Tribadism") by Ludovico Maria Sinistrari (1879 and 1883);
- *Traité des hermaphrodites, parties génitales, accouchemens des femmes, etc.* ("Treatise on Hermaphrodites, Genitalia, Childbirth, etc.") by Jacques Duval and Alcide Bonneau (1880); and
- *L'amour aux colonies; singularités physiologiques et passionnelles, observées durant trente années de séjour dans les colonies françaises, Cochinchine, Tonkin et Cambodge, Guyane et Martinique, Sénégal et Rivières du Sud, Nouvelle Calédonie, Nouvelle Hébrides et Tahiti* ("Love in the Colonies: Singularities of Physiology and Passion Observed During a Thirty Years' Sojourn in the French Colonies of Vietnam, Tonkin and Cambodia, Guyana and Martinique, Senegal and Southern Rivers, New Caledonia, New Hebrides and Tahiti") by "Dr. X. Jacobus" (1893); and
- *Discipline in School and Cloister*, also by "Dr. X. Jacobus" (1902).<sup>57</sup>

Liseux also published an undated and anonymous erotic work titled *White Stains*; the author is reputed to be Ernest Dowson, a member, with Yeats, of the Rhymer's Club, and a nineteenth-century villanellist of some repute.

Nothing is clearer than that the *idea* of the villanelle as a Renaissance form was far more important to the fabricators of nineteenth-century villanelles than any actual Renaissance poetry, no matter how much admiration they heaped upon Passerat's "J'ay



perdu ma Tourterelle." The French and English post-Romantics did of course read widely in Renaissance lyric, recovering in particular the works of Ronsard and the other members of the *Pléiade*, and their discoveries made much of that literature more widely available. Prosper Blanchemain, for instance, supplied a scholarly edition of the works of Passerat in 1880 in addition to editions and biographies of Ronsard, Malherbe, Vauquelin, and other Renaissance authors. Nevertheless, the motive energy that produced new villanelles by Banville, Gosse, Dobson, Boulmier, and their immediate successors was not so much a desire to imitate the poets of the Renaissance as it was a spirit of competition with their contemporaries. But this was disguised: Boulmier alone framed the rules he set down for the villanelle as an edict rather than "a treatise," "a plea," or "a note."

## Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century, the idea that the villanelle was a form dating from the French Renaissance or earlier was firmly established.<sup>58</sup> Poets and scholars of poetry, relying especially on the work of Banville, Gosse, and Dobson, showed less interest in actual Renaissance villanelles than they did in the potential of the villanelle to be mobilized in aesthetic challenges to the didacticism and conservatism of the most strongly established nineteenth-century poetry. Yet the challenge embodied in the villanelle lacked modernism's commitment to contemporary experimentation; the strategy of the French and English post-Romantics was to "make it old" rather than to "make it new." Perhaps because of this regressive strategy, even at the height of the villanelle's

"revival" in the late nineteenth century the form was never particularly important. The French forms were championed in the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties by Gosse, Dobson, Wilde, Stevenson, and Swinburne; Gleeson White's *Ballades and Rondeaux, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, &c*, first published by W. Scott in London in 1887, went through several British and American printings before the turn of the century. But in those two decades, fewer than two dozen poets attempted the form in French or English, and most of those poets only attempted it once or twice (see Appendix II). Only six of them were French: Banville, Boyer, Boulmier, Rollinat, and Leconte de Lisle. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find another half-dozen poets who have written villanelles in French since then.

As early as 1882, famed poetry scholar George Saintsbury wrote dismissively of the villanelle and other "artificial forms," but he did claim to defend the old French forms against an even more critical mainstream:

It has been customary to see in the adoption of these forms a sign of decadence, but this can hardly be sustained in face of the fact that, in Charles d'Orléans and Villon respectively, the Rondel and the Ballade were the occasion of poetry far surpassing in vigour and in grace all preceding work of the kind, and also in presence of the service which the sonnet--a form almost if not quite as artificial--has notoriously done to poetry. (*French Lyrics* 101)

The prevailing view that Saintsbury describes and partly shares was that the villanelle and the other French forms were emotionally and technically overwrought. What was to

Banville and his cohort "ravishing," "sparkling," "dainty," "charming," "graceful," and in the best sense "naïve" was to others "artificial," "trifling," and "decadent." The coding of these terms hardly needs to be pointed out; what was often at stake was masculinity itself. The villanelle and the other French forms were not so much feminine as effeminate; they were implicitly associated with homoerotic sexuality. That the villanelle became more successful in Britain than in France was partly due to the additional allure of exoticism. France itself and all things French, of course, overwhelmingly represented to Anglophone culture an effusive polymorphic sexuality that was either frightening or freeing, revolutionary or repugnant, depending.

The villanelle quickly earned a reputation as a second-rate form of poetry, then, perhaps partly as a means of declawing a certain noncompliance to dominant paradigms of masculinity. Yet attempts to write "serious" villanelles date almost from the very beginning of the villanelle's revival. The first villanelle of that revival, Banville's "Villanelle de Buloz," was strictly comic, and limerickishly light villanelles did continue to appear throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and do still). W. E. Henley, in particular, used the villanelle for this effect. Villanelles not in this vein tended to be sentimental, pious, or affected by contemporary standards--but the same thing would have to be said about most poetry "hummed at luncheon parties" between 1880 and 1914.<sup>59</sup> Gosse's "Wouldst thou not be content to die" looks to us like one such typically sentimental poem, but Gosse perceived the villanelle as a form "more elaborate and serious [than the rondel, rondeau, and triolet], for which a pathetic or passionate rendering seems almost imperative," and his villanelle adopts pathos as a more serious

mode than the epigrammatic or satiric (*Plea* 64). Edwin Arlington Robinson's austere "The House on the Hill" dates from 1894, and at that date Robinson already sees himself as rehabilitating the form; Robinson wrote of his attraction to "the suggestiveness of these artificial forms--that is, when they treat of something besides bride-roses and ball-rooms" (qtd. in McFarland 79). Such attempts show that the formalist essentialism that would have kept the villanelle in a gemmed ghetto was never absolute, though it was certainly prevalent; generalizations about the hard-coded semantic meaning of an always re-abstractable abstract form (A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A") were as porous then as they ought to be now.

## CHAPTER THREE: Ardent Ways

The history of the villanelle in the first half of the twentieth century has been better understood than the history of the villanelle in the nineteenth century and before, partly because there is little to understand. Contemporary poetry handbooks that sum up the trivialized existence of the form during the first decades of the century in a sentence or two need hardly say more. The post-Romantic movements having either petered out or evolved into something new (e.g., the poetry of the Celtic Twilight), the villanelle appeared chiefly as an occasional guest in popular periodicals; it became the property of amateur poets. Between 1900 and 1945, villanelles almost always appeared in "magazines" and "digests" rather than in the weightier "reviews" (see Appendix II): *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, *Punch*, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, *Literary Digest*, *Writer's Digest*, *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*. The villanelle appealed to bibliophiles, as well; instances can be found in *Book-Lover* and *Bookman*. The villanelle was briefly explained and illustrated in several mass-audience poetry handbooks, and there was of course Gosse's entry in the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.<sup>60</sup> "Villanelle" was by no means a household word, but the rules of the form had been released into the teeming din of general knowledge.

If the amateur villanelles were infrequent, villanelles by now-canonical writers in the same period were even rarer: Ezra Pound's free-verse "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" of 1915; James Joyce's "Villanelle of the Temptress," written circa 1900 and first published in 1915 in the serial version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; William Empson's three villanelles of 1928, 1937, and 1940; and W. H. Auden's three

villanelles of 1940 and 1944 comprise almost the entirety of the catalogue.

Ronald McFarland's *The Villanelle* obscures the continued inconsequentiality of the villanelle in the early decades of the century by treating the period from 1915 to 1953 (Pound to Plath) as one phase, a key phase, in the development of the villanelle. The chapter "From Ezra Pound to Mid-Century: The Form in a Major Key" concludes that "By the end of the 1950's, the villanelle had been established as an accepted form in English and American poetry. Its range had been demonstrated. [...] Most important, however, were the achievements with the form by poets of major stature, from Pound and Auden to Thomas and Roethke" (96). McFarland's work thus implies that there was a steady development in the form from high modernism to the major poets of the nineteen-fifties, and elsewhere he makes this claim more explicit, writing that "Since the end of the nineteenth century, the villanelle has had a fairly strong and steady growth among poets writing in English" (59). Manfred Pfister's 1982 article "Die Villanelle in der englischen Moderne: Joyce, Empson, Dylan Thomas" ("The Villanelle in English Modernism: Joyce, Empson, Dylan Thomas") carries the same implications of a relatively unified modernist attitude toward the villanelle, though in his view the modernists did not work to demonstrate the range of the form; they worked to dissociate themselves from it. Pfister argues that the villanelles by the three authors he discusses are the result of the "quotation quality" ("Zitatcharakter") of modernist poetics, in which Joyce, Empson, and Thomas "quote" fixed forms ironically in order to distance themselves from those forms and the *fin de siècle* ideals they expressed (298).

I would argue, however, that it is a mistake to trace a coherent narrative of any kind regarding the villanelle in this period. There is little continuity between the villanelles by now-canonical poets in the first half of the century; these instances represent neither a shared effort to make the villanelle serious through modernist *gravitas* nor a shared effort to make modernism serious through ironizing the villanelle. Pound's "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" does proclaim his rejection of the villanelle's poetic scheme, and Joyce's treatment of his own "Villanelle of the Temptress" in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* does essentially satirize Stephen's hackneyed conception of art, but these were isolated instances that did not influence the later villanelles of Empson, Auden, and Thomas unless indirectly. William Empson's sudden and evidently entirely idiosyncratic adoption of the villanelle, by contrast, had nothing ironic about it. Auden's first two villanelles of 1940/1941 were also unironic experiments with the form, but Auden also uses the villanelle as a dramatic monologue for Miranda in *The Sea and the Mirror* (1944) to emphasize her naïveté--a term that had by then lost the positive connotations it had for the post-Romantics. Dylan Thomas wrote two villanelles: a parody of William Empson titled "Request to Leda" in 1942 and, nine years later, "Do not go gentle into that good night"--a wholly serious treatment of the form. Joyce and Pound could remember the heyday of the French forms in the eightennineties, and were still exposed to popular examples of the forms in certain patriotic poems, whereas the later modernists had little if any knowledge of any prior examples of the villanelle. For Empson, Auden, and Thomas, the abstract scheme of the form existed separately from its post-Romantic history.

Moreover, the villanelle in this period should be considered at least to some extent in the context of the status and practice of the "French forms" in general.<sup>61</sup> From a contemporary perspective, the villanelle is different from the other French forms in two respects: it is more popular with contemporary poets, and it has no history prior to the nineteenth century (we now know). Both of these distinctions make the villanelle an interesting topic for study. But neither distinction applied in the early decades of the twentieth century, before a significant number of serious poets had attempted the villanelle and before the Parnassian confusion concerning its origins was exposed. Banville and Gosse and their followers had written more rondeaus than they had villanelles, and Andrew Lang preferred the ballade to any other of the French forms. There was little to suggest that the villanelle would be the fittest to survive. From the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, the villanelle was just one among the many French forms, and structurally, though not historically, it is indeed highly similar to the triolet, the ballade, the chant royale, the rondeau, the rondel, and other cousins. Most are characterized by refrain and by a frugal allotment of rhyme sounds: it is in fact no wonder that Passerat's nonce invention A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A" was confused by Ténint et al. with schemes such as the rondel's ABba abAB abbaA. The fortunes of the villanelle were for many decades coextensive with the fortunes of the other French forms.

The "history" that follows, therefore, is a decidedly incoherent and unteleological one, with snapshots of the villanelle collaged with a snapshot of the rondeau in one of its most famous incarnations, John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields." The silent battle between



the stylistic ideals of high modernism and the pragmatic aims of writers such as McCrae and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts is the proper context for the erratic history of the villanelle in the period; it is perfectly clear that in terms of literary history, the modernists won. All of the incidental footprints in the period show that the villanelle and the other French forms remained lower-class citizens for the high modernists, and that "demonstrating the range" of the villanelle was not within their purview. The villanelle was presumed dead. That very death, that very loss, however, led to the erasure of its history, and that in turn led to a rejuvenation: Empson, Auden, and finally Thomas approached the villanelle as an almost purely abstract entity without the burden of a contentious history.

### **James Joyce (and Stephen Dedalus)**

In 1914, just before the outbreak of the Great War, Ezra Pound facilitated the publishing of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the modernist journal *The Egoist*. The novel appeared in serial form in that journal throughout the years 1914-15, and the scene in which Stephen Dedalus awakes at dawn and composes a villanelle was published as a single installment in the July 1, 1915 issue. The installment begins with the sentence "The rain fell faster," just after Stephen has finishing expounding his aesthetic philosophy to Lynch, and just before Stephen encounters his "beloved," E. C., near the library. It ends with the full text of the villanelle:

Are you not weary of ardent ways,  
Lure of the fallen seraphim?  
Tell no more of enchanted days.

Your eyes have set man's heart ablaze  
 And you have had your will of him.  
 Are you not weary of ardent ways?

Above the flame the smoke of praise  
 Goes up from ocean rim to rim.  
 Tell no more of enchanted days.

Our broken cries and mournful lays  
 Rise in one eucharistic hymn.  
 Are you not weary of ardent ways?

While sacrificing hands upraise  
 The chalice flowing to the brim,  
 Tell no more of enchanted days.

And still you hold our longing gaze  
 With languorous look and lavish limb!  
 Are you not weary of ardent ways?  
 Tell no more of enchanted days. (*Portrait*, Anderson, 223-4)

In the original issue of *The Egoist* and in published versions of the novel, the full text of the villanelle is followed with a row of asterisks, indicating with more emphasis than usual for Joyce that the villanelle marks the end of a discrete episode.

Hans Walter Gabler, on manuscript evidence, suggests that the villanelle scene was belatedly added to a fair copy of *Portrait* in 1914.<sup>62</sup> According to Joyce's brother Stanislaus, "Villanelle of the Temptress" was written much earlier, about 1900, while Joyce--then about eighteen--was in his last year at Belvedere college.<sup>63</sup> Joyce titled his first unpublished book of poems *Moods*, which Stanislaus found to be indicative of Joyce's affection for the moodiness of "romantic piano music: Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Schumann, Schubert" (65). His second unpublished collection was called *Shine and Dark*, after a plan that resembled Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*:

flagrantly simple lyrics with polarized perspectives. "Villanelle of the Temptress" was part of the *Shine and Dark* collection, and it too shows the emphasis of Joyce's lyric poetry on mood. In 1902 Joyce sent a poem (it is not known which one) to Yeats for comment, who, while encouraging, was also frank about the shortcomings of Joyce's lyrical attempts:

I think that the thought is a little thin. Perhaps I will make you angry when I say that it is the poetry of a young man, of a young man who is practicing his instrument, taking pleasure in the mere handling of the stops. [...] The work which you have actually done is very remarkable for a man of your age who has lived away from vital intellectual centres. Your technique in verse is much better than the technique of any young Dublin man I have met during my time. It might have been the work of a young man who had lived in an Oxford literary set. (qtd. in *My Brother's Keeper* 208-9)

In the same year of 1902, probably as a result of this honest assessment from Yeats and a similarly unenthusiastic judgment from the renowned critic William Archer, Joyce destroyed most of his poems, saving only "Villanelle of the Temptress" and a few others. He began work at this time on the verses that appear in a volume titled *Chamber Music* (1907).

The manuscript of *Chamber Music* was complete by September of 1904; at that time, Joyce was devoting serious effort to *Stephen Hero*, which would become *Portrait*.<sup>64</sup> In these years, Joyce was turning ever more resolutely away from poetry and toward

prose. Ellmann writes that Joyce, "quite independently" of his authoritative critics, was "uncertain about his verse":

The principal source of uncertainty, as he acknowledged candidly to Stanislaus and to himself, was that he could not rival his countryman Yeats, whose volume of lyrics, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, had awakened his intense admiration when it appeared in 1899. About his prose, however, he had no such modesty, and he was already beginning to feel he might outdo George Moore, Hardy, and Tureen, if not Tolstoy. In prose he thought he might achieve more subtlety than in meter. (Ellmann 1959, 83)

Joyce seems to have transformed his uncertainty about his own verse to a negative judgment of verse in general as an artistic mode. Joyce's *Portrait* is nothing if not the chronicle of a young man's vocational anxieties: all Stephen's religious, political, and sexual anxieties seem ultimately to be subsumed in the overwhelming question of his artistry. The villanelle that Stephen writes is at the center of all these anxieties, and is one of the results of it. But while Stephen does find some solution to his difficulties by identifying himself as an artist in exile, the kind of art that Stephen produces in the course of *Portrait*, most notably the villanelle, proves inadequate to characterize and ameliorate those anxieties. The inadequacies of the villanelle as an artistic genre produce the desire for an art that will be less inadequate, and thus the mimetic experimental prose style of *Portrait*, *Dubliners*, and *Ulysses* comes to replace outdated forms like the villanelle, and indeed lyric more generally.

The scene in which Stephen composes "Villanelle of the Temptress"

in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* immediately follows the central exposition of Stephen's famous aesthetic philosophy:

--Lessing, said Stephen, should not have taken a group of statues to write of. The art, being inferior, does not present the forms I spoke of distinguished clearly one from another. Even in literature, the highest and most spiritual art, the forms are often confused. The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion. The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. This progress you will see easily in that old English ballad *Turpin Hero* which begins in the first person and ends in the third person. The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

--Trying to refine them also out of existence, said Lynch. (214-5)

Stephen here proposes a tripartite categorical hierarchy of literary form: first and lowest is the lyric, second is the simple epic, third and highest is the dramatic. The theory he expounds assumes that a progression from the lowest forms to the highest forms is possible, and that continued growth as an artist will proceed along those lines. Although some critics have suggested that *Portrait* is itself the best exemplar of Stephen's aesthetic

philosophy, I would suggest that Joyce might well not consider *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to have achieved the third and highest level of dramatic form. *Portrait* and its early rendering *Stephen Hero* seem to have more in common with its cognate *Turpin Hero* at the second rank, especially when compared to the later achievement of *Ulysses*.

And if a seemingly authorless mimesis is the gold standard, all Joyce's novels might be said to be inferior to staged drama. Joyce, who idolized Ibsen in his youth, never mastered the genre of the play: he wrote one called *A Brilliant Career* in 1900, just before he began to write *Portrait*, but destroyed it in 1902; he wrote another called *Exiles* in 1915, just after he finished *Portrait*, but it flopped badly when it was ultimately produced in Munich in 1919.<sup>65</sup> (The ideal artist Joyce describes resembles a safely ensconced theatrical prompter as much as he resembles an indifferent God.) *Portrait*, for all its undeniable advances in the direction of impersonal mimetic narration, is equally undeniably centered on the Joycean figure of Stephen, who certainly "prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event"; it is true that "the narrative is no longer *purely* personal" [emphasis added], but neither is it yet as purely impersonal as Joyce's later works. *Portrait* has not yet "reached" the highest form, the "dramatic form," but it has surpassed the lowest form, represented by Stephen's "purely personal" lyric impulse. *Portrait*, precisely inverting the model of *Turpin Hero*, begins in the third person and ends in the first person—but we can imagine that at the end of *Portrait* Stephen launches himself toward an anticipated eventual return to his idyllic third-person origin, where all that exists is the story without any apparent narrator: "Once upon a time

and a very good time it was . . ." (7). Moreover, Joyce seems to have shaped his own literary career to the trajectory that Stephen outlines. As Richard Ellmann writes, "His work began in the merest lyric and ended in the vastest encyclopedia" (1982, 4). Stephen's villanelle exemplifies the form of literature Stephen relegates to the lowest rank, the rank of literature attempted by neophytes: lyric.

The choice to use the villanelle in *Portrait* as an exemplar of lesser art rather than another lyric was probably due to the efficiency of its semiotic labor. In other words, because the villanelle form had a low reputation in the period, a modernist audience would be able to recognize the immaturity of Stephen's lyricism, and, of course, to compare it to the far greater sophistication and originality of Joyce's prose. That Joyce's contemporaries did indeed perform this kind of comparison is seen in Alice Corbin Henderson's 1919 review of a new edition of *Chamber Music* in the modernist journal *Poetry*. Henderson agreed with the unenthusiastic judgments of Yeats, Archer, and Joyce himself about the inadequacy and outdatedness of Joyce's early verse. The term "thin" recurred:

Mr. James Joyce is better known as a novelist and playwright than as a poet, and deservedly so. For after everything has been said that could possibly be said in favor of his poems--after one has noted their musical phrasing, their verbal felicity, their delicate charm--the fact is that the general tone is rather pale and anaemic and the music thin. The music indeed has been compared to that of the Elizabethan song books, but this is hardly fair to Mr. Joyce; and the spirit of the poems is much closer to

the 1890's than to the Elizabethan mood, which is very much fuller and richer in every way. (98-9)

Henderson's point that "the spirit of the poems is much closer to the 1890's than to the Elizabethan mood" applies also or even more so to "Villanelle of the Temptress," whose form as well as spirit derived from that era.

Contemporary Joyce scholars commenting on *Portrait* have debated the merits of Stephen's villanelle in the course of discussing the degree of aesthetic distance between Joyce and Stephen in the scene of the villanelle's composition; most, though not all, have agreed that whatever our own reactions to the poem may be, Joyce does not endorse it as an example of good art.<sup>66</sup> Knowledge of the general reputation of the villanelle in the period lends weight to the proposition that Stephen's villanelle is treated ironically, even satirically, and that by the time Joyce included it in the manuscript of *Portrait* circa 1914 he felt a considerable distance from it. The modernist readers of *The Egoist*, with the works of the post-Romantics still in their memories, would almost surely have perceived the villanelle as a trite, outdated form. As Robert Adams Day writes,

[T]hough Stephen is not quite so arrogant as to say to himself, "I think I'll write a villanelle this morning," he virtually says so, and this fact shows that he is thinking in clichés, for the villanelle, though an ancient and beautiful French form, had had a great vogue among the precious poetasters of the naughty nineties in England, and by the time *A Portrait* appeared had already become as wearily conventional and thoroughly



exhausted as the Petrarchan sonnet had become by the death of  
Queen Elizabeth. (77-8)

The function of the villanelle in *Portrait*, then, is to show that, as Robert Adams Day puts it, "Stephen the youthful poet systematically violates every rule and requirement of Stephen the precocious critic" (81). Stephen's villanelle is not meant to be taken seriously; Stephen's aesthetic principles are. Most serious of all is Joyce's prose technique, which differs so radically from Stephen's villanelle.

The prominent role "Villanelle of the Temptress" plays in *Portrait* was probably a significant factor in the survival of the villanelle in a twentieth-century poetic crucible that contained no more than a few disregarded examples. Dylan Thomas, in particular, almost certainly encountered the villanelle form in Joyce's *Portrait*, though it is unlikely that his "Do not go gentle into that good night" was influenced either positively or negatively by the actual execution of "Villanelle of the Temptress." Thomas published a collection of autobiographical short stories titled *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Dog* in 1940, and while he denied that the title derived from Joyce, he did admit that he had read Joyce's early work and might have been influenced by the prose style of *Dubliners*.<sup>67</sup> The publicity that Joyce's *Portrait* gave to the villanelle form probably constitutes the entirety of the effect "Villanelle of the Temptress" has had upon poets—but this is not insignificant, given the immensity of Joyce's reputation and the difficulty of judging the author's attitude toward the villanelle in *Portrait*. That Joyce included "Villanelle of the Temptress" in *Portrait*, even as an example of immature art, is highly likely to have contributed to the reputation of the villanelle as a legitimate genre.

## Ezra Pound

The villanelle in *Portrait* has had a wide distribution and a copious commentary; the same cannot be said for two 1915 mentions of the villanelle by Ezra Pound, both of which are addressed by McFarland as though they were as important to the history of literature as Stephen's "Villanelle of the Temptress." In his preface to the poems of Rhymers' Club member Lionel Johnson, Pound wrote, "The villanelle, even, can at its best achieve the closest intensity, I mean when, as with Dowson, the refrains are an emotional fact, which the intellect, in the various gyrations of the poem, tries in vain and in vain to escape" (qtd. in McFarland 83); a poem by Pound titled "Villanelle: the Psychological Hour" then appeared in the December 1915 issue of the modernist journal *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. McFarland reads these two mentions of the villanelle as intimately related: "As Pound observed, the important thing is that the refrain constitute an 'emotional fact' and that the remainder of the poem be a vain attempt to 'escape' by intellectual maneuvering. Certainly that is what occurs in this villanelle" (85). I would argue, instead, that Pound's own free-form poem stands in opposition to his casual defense of the villanelle, and is probably a more accurate index to his attitude.

At the same time, Pound's comment does remind us of a certain continuity between the modernists and the post-Romantics, especially the Decadents, a continuity that is also visible in the appearance of Stephen's essentially Decadent villanelle in Joyce's *Portrait*. Yeats also admired Dowson, and for that matter Johnson, never entirely repudiating his Rhymers' Club affiliations: "Dowson and Johnson most I praise," he

inscribed in his poem "The Grey Rock," published in *Responsibilities* in 1914 (104). But Yeats and Pound were increasingly committed to eliminating such characteristics as archaic diction, inverted syntax, and romantic moodiness, and Dowson's poetry, like that of Gosse and Dobson, was heavily laden with these qualities. "Villanelle of Marguerites" seems, of Dowson's five villanelles, the one that best illustrates the idea of refrains that represent an inescapable emotional fact, while Dowson's "Villanelle of Acheron" (1899) may achieve Pound's "closest intensity":<sup>68</sup>

By the pale marge of Acheron  
Methinks we shall pass restfully,  
Beyond the scope of any sun.

There all men hie them one by one,  
Far from the stress of earth and sea,  
By the pale marge of Acheron.

'Tis well when life and love is done,  
'Tis very well at last to be,  
Beyond the scope of any sun.

No busy voices there shall stun  
Our ears: the stream flows silently  
By the pale marge of Acheron.

There is the crown of labour won,  
The sleep of immortality,  
Beyond the scope of any sun.

Life, of thy gifts I will have none,  
My Queen is that Persephone,  
By the pale marge of Acheron,  
Beyond the scope of any sun. (Dowson 101)

The Acheron villanelle achieves a stark effect similar to that of Robinson's "The House on the Hill," even without Robinson's spare diction, and it may be this effect that Pound found worthy of some praise.

Pound himself had early on written fairly well-received examples of complex fixed forms such as the sestina and the ballade<sup>7</sup>, not to mention the sonnet, most of which were associated with the troubadours of Provençal. Following Browning and the Pre-Raphaelites, Pound adopted medieval models: Dante, Cavalcanti, Villon. His poetic vocation, too, demanded of him that he gain mastery of a range of lyric forms as practice for the epic he knew he would one day write: "For a time," writes Hugh Witemeyer, "he wrote a sonnet a day for practice" (43). Pound's first book of verse, *Lume Spento* (1908), included many pieces in the conventional forms of Provençal poets, many of them dramatic monologues in the voices of the medieval poets themselves.

By 1913, however, when "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" was probably written, Pound had committed to the more aggressively experimental modern poetics of Imagism. Pound soon refused to be bound even by the tenets of Imagism, however, and by 1914 he would repudiate the movement and invent the new school of Vorticism, which differed from Imagism chiefly in including non-literary forms of art. Thomas F. Grieve sees some of Pound's poetry in this era as emphasizing *logopoeia* (poetry of the word, of memory) rather than the Imagist *phanopoeia* (poetry of the image, of vision) or *melopoeia* (poetry of the sound, of voice).<sup>69</sup> Pound's "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" definitely seems to be an experiment in this *logopoeic* mode; even the designation "psychological" and the pun in the second line indicate that the poem explores mind and word:

I.

I had over-prepared the event--  
that much was ominous.

With middle-ageing care  
 I had laid out just the right books,  
 I had almost turned down the pages.

*Beauty is so rare a thing.  
 So few drink of my fountain.*

So much barren regret,  
 So many hours wasted!  
 And now I watch, from the window,  
 rain, wandering busses.

"Their little cosmos is shaken"--  
 the air is alive with that fact.  
 In their parts of the city  
 they are played on by diverse forces.  
 How do I know?  
 Oh, I know well enough.  
 For them there is something afoot.  
 As for me:  
 I had over-prepared the event.

*Beauty is so rare a thing.  
 So few drink of my fountain.*

Two friends: a breath of the forest . . .  
 Friends? Are people less friends  
 because one has just, at last, found them?

Twice they promised to come.  
 "Between the night and morning?"

*Beauty would drink of my mind.*  
 Youth would awhile forget  
 my youth is gone from me.

## II.

("Speak up! You have danced so stiffly?  
 Someone admired your works,  
 And said so frankly.

"Did you talk like a fool,  
 The first night?

The second evening?"

*"But they promised again:  
"Tomorrow at tea-time."")*

### III.

Now the third day is here--  
no word from either;  
No word from her nor him,  
Only another man's note:  
"Dear Pound, I am leaving England."<sup>70</sup>

There are few aural effects in the poem, and only one vivid image ("rain, wandering busses"); the poem is most notably a collection of voices marked by italics, punctuation marks, and parentheses, and most of them are apparently Pound's own internal voices.

According to Pound's biographer Humphrey Carpenter, the incident that occasioned this "uncharacteristically personal" poem concerned the French experimental sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, whom Pound had recently met at a 1913 exhibition of Gaudier's work:

Henri Gaudier, who called himself Gaudier-Brzeska, was twenty-one years old when he met the twenty-eight-year-old Ezra Pound.[...] He had studied art here and there, and in Paris had met and taken up with Sophie Brzeska, a neurotic Polishwoman twenty years older than he who was threatening to kill herself.[...] Following their brief encounter at the Albert Hall, Ezra took pains to discover Gaudier-Brzeska's address, and wrote to him inviting him to supper. There was no reply, and on the day suggested, the sculptor did not appear. (215-6)

This neglect by an artist Pound regarded with enthusiasm seems to have made him feel beside the point, superannuated, unable to share in the limber vigor of modernism; the poem sketches a (pre-)Prufrockian emotion of feeling of extraneity and superfluity that is named explicitly as Pound's own. The felt difference between a twenty-eight-year-old self-proclaimed revolutionary and a twenty-one-year-old self-proclaimed revolutionary should not be minimized; in this period Pound was highly conscious that he was aging. Certainly Gaudier-Brzeska seemed able to out-Bohemian the extremely Bohemian Pound: Carpenter writes that "[Gaudier-Brzeska's] early days in London were a saga of friendships and useful connections made only to be destroyed by his and Sophie's strange behaviour.[...H]e was, said Richard Aldington, 'probably the dirtiest human being ever known, and gave off horrid effluvia in hot weather' " (216). Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska did become friends, and Pound exerted himself to promote the sculptor's work, especially after the founding of interdisciplinary Vorticism. Gaudier-Brzeska was killed in France in June of 1915, and Pound immediately assembled and published a memoir of him that was published in 1916.<sup>71</sup> The publication of "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" in December 1915 may well have been a kind of memorial to Gaudier-Brzeska, though there was no indication in *Poetry* of the poem's origin or subject matter.

It is difficult to know why Pound titled the poem "Villanelle." McFarland sees it as Pound's attempt to write a poem on his own definition of the villanelle as a form dramatizing "emotional fact, which the intellect, in the various gyrations of the poem, tries in vain and in vain to escape," and this description does indeed seem apposite

(McFarland 85). There are recurrent lines in the poem, though they do not have the conspicuous character of refrain: "I had over-prepared the event" is a repetend, as is the couplet "Beauty is so rare a thing / So few drink of my fountain." The repeated couplet later merges into the single line "Beauty would drink of my mind" in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the way a villanelle's two separated refrains ultimately merge into a couplet. Pound does not otherwise seem to be experimenting with or even referencing the villanelle scheme in any significant way.

I would argue that the term "villanelle" in the title serves chiefly to underscore the themes of fogyish superannuation in the poem: it is the kind of form employed by a man who over-prepares events, takes "middle-ageing care," dances stiffly. Pound seems here to recant and regret his own earlier use of the old French and Provençal forms, as though that poetic phase had foreshadowed or caused his current abandonment by friends, by youth itself. Pound's general attitude toward the French forms at this period and later, however, was to ignore them completely. He did not repeat his early experiments with them, and "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" received little attention.

## **John McCrae**

A much more significant individual poem in the social history of the French forms than Pound's "Villanelle" was John McCrae's rondeau "In Flanders Fields," first published anonymously in the December 8, 1915 issue of London's widely-circulated illustrated magazine *Punch*:



In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
    That mark our place; and in the sky  
    The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
    Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
    The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
    If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.<sup>72</sup>

"In Flanders Fields" was a tremendous popular phenomenon in World War One.

Its author, John McCrae, was a Canadian doctor, Scottish by birth, who had served in the Boer War of 1899-1902; he died in 1918, just before the war ended, of pneumonia.

Although it is not clear who first singled out the poem in *Punch* for attention, by 1917 it was so well-known that one famous Canadian Victory Bonds poster and billboard could simply allude to it (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Canadian Victory Bonds poster, Frank Lucien Nicolet, 1917.

The Victory Bonds campaign had been meant to raise \$150 million; instead it raised \$400 million, and the poster's artist, Frank Lucien Nicolet, was awarded a prize by the Canadian government.<sup>73</sup> At least a dozen songs based on the poem appeared between 1917 and 1919, including one by John Philip Sousa.<sup>74</sup> "Reply poems" also proliferated. Most famously, the Flanders poppy became an instantly recognizable symbol worn in Canada and Britain on November 11, Remembrance Day, to commemorate the Great War dead.<sup>75</sup>

Few of the patriots and propagandists who quoted the poem seemed aware that it was an example of a traditional French form, a form with a name, history, and fixed

scheme. Such knowledge was irrelevant, or seemed so. Reply poems, for instance, invariably imitated "In Flanders Fields" even to the point of lifting entire phrases from it, yet just as invariably altered the scheme even when apparently attempting to emulate it. Medieval and Renaissance fixed-form rondeaus were of ten, thirteen, or fifteen lines; in the nineteenth century, the post-Romantics (including Banville in his *Petit traité de poésie française*) overwhelmingly preferred the fifteen-line scheme: aabba aabR aabbaR, with the refrain ("R") consisting of the first few words of the first line of the poem. McCrae's poem, like the rondeaus of post-Romantics such as Banville and Dobson, adheres precisely to this scheme, whereas the scheme of Moina Michael's 1918 reply poem "We Shall Keep the Faith" is only somewhat similar:

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,  
 Sleep sweet -- to rise anew!  
 We caught the torch you threw  
 And holding high, we keep the Faith  
 With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red  
 That grows on fields where valor led;  
 It seems to signal to the skies  
 That blood of heroes never dies,  
 But lends a lustre to the red  
 Of the flower that blooms above the dead  
 In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red  
 We wear in honor of our dead.  
 Fear not that ye have died for naught;  
 We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought  
 In Flanders Fields. (Michael 3)

The scheme of Michael's poem is abbcd eeffggR gghhR; it is a form based essentially on stanzas of rhymed couplets with a single hemistich appended to each

stanza. With its three top-heavy stanzas of varying length, it looks like "In Flanders Fields," but it is almost as different in structure as it is in tone, diction, meter, and sense.<sup>76</sup> Moina Michael, a teacher at the University of Georgia, had seen McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" reprinted in the *Ladies' Home Journal* just before the Armistice in 1918, and the poem and accompanying illustration (see Figure 3) moved her so strongly that, she reported, she immediately composed the above poem on the back of an envelope.

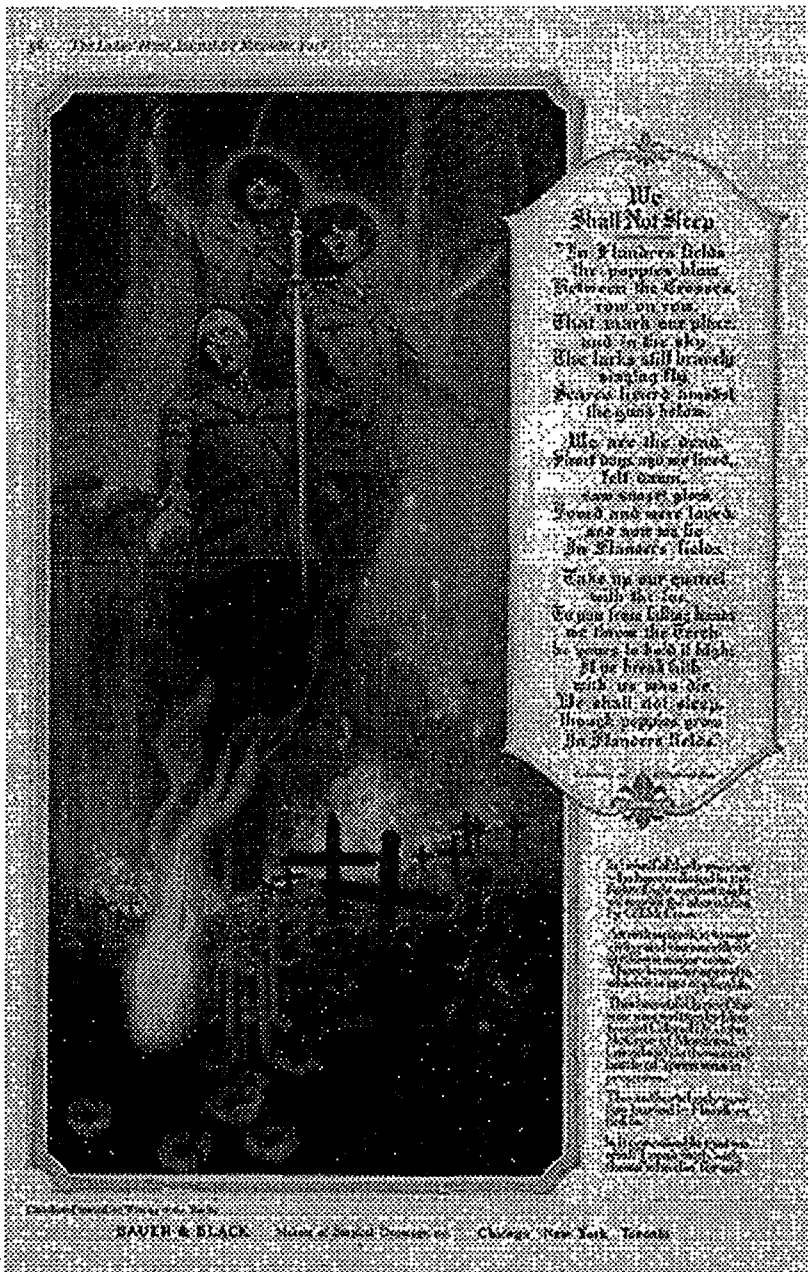


Figure 3: *Ladies' Home Journal* 35.11 (1918 Nov): 56.

Subsequently, Michael was the prime mover in getting the Flanders poppy adopted as a Remembrance Day symbol, and was the first to sell artificial poppies as a fundraising

tactic. Despite her great investment in the poem's message and symbolism, however, she remained unaware of the tradition behind its form.

Perhaps the most notable example of ignorance of the rondeau with respect to "In Flanders Fields" came in 1919, when a posthumous collection of McCrae's poems was published. A biographical essay appended to *In Flanders Fields, and Other Poems* explained at length that "In Flanders Fields" was a highly original variety of sonnet. Sir Andrew Macphail, who had edited the *University Magazine* at McGill University in Montreal when McCrae was a student there, claimed that he had known that McCrae was the author of the anonymous poem in *Punch* because he recognized its form, having remembered publishing an earlier poem of McCrae's titled "The Night Cometh" with the same scheme:

It will be observed at once by reference to the text that in form the two poems are identical. They contain the same number of lines and feet as surely all sonnets do. Each travels upon two rhymes with the members of a broken couplet in widely separated refrain.[...] It was a form upon which he had worked for years, and made his own. When the moment arrived the medium was ready. No other medium could have so well conveyed the thought (50)

Macphail, unaware that both poems are rondeaus, argues that their (supposedly) unusual form is proof of McCrae's originality. Macphail, led in his opinion by another semi-literary army officer, even avers that "In Flanders Fields" has reached such a height of innovative structural excellence that its novel "sonnet" form might well *become* fixed:

The poem was first called to my attention by a Sapper officer, then Major, now Brigadier. [...] This officer could himself weave the sonnet with deft fingers, and he pointed out many deep things. It is to the sappers that the army always goes for "technical material."

The poem, he explained, consists of thirteen lines in iambic tetrameter and two lines of two iambs each; in all, one line more than the sonnet's count. There are two rhymes only, since the short lines must be considered blank, and are, in fact, identical. But it is a difficult mode. It is true, he allowed, that the octet of the sonnet has only two rhymes, but these recur only four times, and the liberty of the sestet tempers its despotism,--which I thought a pretty phrase.[...] One is so often reminded of the poverty of men's invention, their best being so incomplete, that one welcomes what--this Sapper officer surmised--may become a new and fixed mode of expression in verse. (53-5)

This ingeniously incorrect explication shows that the fact that "In Flanders Fields" was a rondeau had nothing to do with its popular success. It was not held up as an excellent example of the form, as it is today in some poetry handbooks. The form was unknown to most of McCrae's contemporary readers, even to those with literary pretensions and with a strong desire to prove that McCrae was a gifted poet. There can be little doubt that if the sapper officer had known of the rondeau, Macphail would have argued that skill with a traditional form rather than formal innovation was McCrae's particular gift. Clearly the influence of modernism's "make it new" philosophy had sufficiently permeated the

mainstream for Macphail to be able to cite inventiveness as a positive trait for a poet--yet Macphail seems slightly embarrassed to be taking such a position: "one welcomes" innovation only because there is little else to welcome.

The explanation for John McCrae's adoption of the rondeau form is likely to have been almost exactly the opposite of that forwarded by Macphail. McCrae's rondeau, like Stephen's villanelle, shows that its author is writing from the cautious margins rather than making daring Poundian forays from the safe center. To be Canadian was to be at least as provincial (by London and Oxford standards) as to be Irish; McCrae, ten years older than Joyce and by profession a doctor, never made the move that Joyce made away from late-Victorian styles toward a fresh and international, or extra-national, modernist experimentalism. McCrae had begun publishing poetry in McGill's *University Magazine*, *Varsity*, and *Canadian Magazine* in the eighteen-nineties. In form many of McCrae's poems, like Joyce's in *Chamber Music*, were simple *abab* or *aabb* stanzas; there were also several ballads, indicating that McCrae had been influenced by the pre-Raphaelites and/or by Scottish models. Two poems, "Isandlwana" and "The Song of the Derelict," are on a scheme which appears to be a rather unusual ballad variation: aRaRbbbR. Robert Burns's "Duncan Gray," composed about 1792, is on the same scheme; the Scotland-born McCrae might here be placing himself in a Scottish tradition. That the rondeau was a "French" form may have contributed to his interest in it (though his models were more likely to be the English examples of the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties); McCrae's poetry, with its French and Scottish and English schemes, almost seems to



imitate the elbow-to-elbow populations of French, Scottish, and English extraction in Montreal.

"In Flanders Fields" has in the twentieth century probably been considered most important in the context of Canadian poetry and Canadian national identity. The scholar Thomas B. Vincent addresses the question of why the heroic ideal survives in the work of McCrae and other Canadian poets of the Great War when British poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen abandoned that ideal; he attributes this difference chiefly to Canada's emerging nationhood:

Instinctively, if not consciously, the Canadian poets discovered that, culturally, Canada was not Britain. They understood what poets like Owen were talking about; they had the personal experience required to appreciate that. But they knew in their poetic guts that the grim vision of life that energized Owen's verse was not relevant to Canadian imagination in a central way. [...] Among intelligent Canadians, there was no denial of the obscenities of war or of the moral implications of these brutalities, but there was also no denial of the perception that war contributed significantly to national maturation [...] (167)

In this argument, McCrae's poetry defines itself as Canadian by defining itself against British poetry, but it might be more accurate to say that McCrae's poetry defines itself as Canadian by defining itself with pre-war poetry and values. McCrae's values, like his poetic forms, were just behind the curve of nations more secure in their nationhood.

Still, when compared with the typical rondeau in Gleeson White's 1887 anthology *Ballades and Rondeaux, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles &c*, "In Flanders Fields" looks remarkably modern. "The Sweet, Sad Years," by Rev. Charles D. Bell, D. D., for instance, begins "The sweet sad years; the sun, the rain, / Alas! too quickly did they wane" and continues in the typical key of a pleasurable romantic melancholy expressed in end-stopped lines, archaic diction, and inverted syntax (153). The association of such predictable poems with the rondeau form had never fully entered public consciousness, but serious poetry professionals still remembered, and judged "In Flanders Fields" harshly not only by comparing it to the more radical poems emerging from modernism, but also by comparing it to the puerile rondeaus that had emerged from the *vers de société* movement. When *In Flanders Fields, and Other Poems* was reviewed in the July 1919 issue of *Poetry* along with several other war-themed works, Alice Corbin Henderson (whose unfavorable review of Joyce's *Chamber Music* had appeared in the previous issue of *Poetry*) recognized "In Flanders Fields" as a rondeau. This, she considered, was in itself a flaw:

The books listed above are mostly journalism, but now and then some poem lifts the emotion of the moment into song, thus winning a chance of survival after the moment has passed. John McCrae achieves this in the much-quoted *In Flanders Fields*--achieves it by sheer simplicity and concentration in the expression of a moving and tragic appeal. Another poem on the same motive--a living soldier's address to *The Anxious*

*Dead*--is perhaps still finer, and its quatrains fit the subject  
better than the too-slight rondeau form of the first. (221)

Henderson was virtually alone among critics in awarding even this qualified praise to "In Flanders Fields"; the poem's very success with an ignorant public probably doomed it in the discriminating eyes of the modernists and their inheritors even after the reputation of the French forms for "slightness" had been forgotten. Yet "In Flanders Fields," rather like Stephen's villanelle, was neither wholly akin to its "too-slight" schematic progenitors nor wholly divided from them, though certainly the poem achieved too perfect a compromise with traditional forms and values to be attractive to the modernists.

"In Flanders Fields" has long been disregarded or harshly judged by literary scholars, most notably by Paul Fussell in his well-known work *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), who writes that "words like *vicious* and *stupid* would not seem to go too far" to describe the final stanza of the poem. Fussell also avers that "indeed it could be said that the rigorously regular meter with which the poem introduces the poppies makes them seem already fabricated of wire and paper," even though the poem's meter is by no means clumsy, varying through caesura and enjambment if not through substitution (249). Fussell nevertheless makes an interesting point about the implications of the poppy as a choice of symbol; in Fussell's argument, the image of the poppy--like the rondeau form, which Fussell does not discuss--serves to link McCrae's poem with the work of the Decadents:

It would be a mistake to imagine that the poppies in Great War writings  
got there just because they are actually there in the French and Belgian

fields.[...] For half a century before the fortuitous publicity attained by the poppies of Flanders, this association with homoerotic love had been conventional, in works by Wilde, Douglas, the Victorian painter Simeon Solomon, John Addington Symonds, and countless others. (247-8)

Fussell sees "the conception of soldiers as lovers" in the lines "Short days ago / We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, / Loved and were loved, and now we lie / In Flanders fields"; such references serve to link the poem only too firmly, in Fussell's view, to "Victorian male sentimental poetry" (248).

Fred Crawford, in his 1988 book *British Poets of the Great War*, shares Fussell's judgment: "That the poem's closing seems unworthy of its beginning results from two abrupt shifts--the change in tone to the demand and threat of the last six lines and the use of chivalric imagery and diction [...] outside the pastoral tradition for which the reader has been prepared" (38). Both critics seem to resent what is after all nothing but a standard *volta* in the third stanza, finding the turn both unconvincing and offensive, and the more so because the first two stanzas of the poem seem to promise a fully modernist take on the Great War. As Vincent writes, "Indeed, the narrative voice of the poem has some disturbing similarities to that of Eliot's 'Hollow Men' " (169). Vincent, like Crawford and Fussell, places the poem in the pastoral tradition, but because none of these critics discuss the rondeau form, they all miss the point that the poem is most influenced by the faux-pastoral and decidedly chivalric "tradition" of late-Victorian Paris and London. The false pastoral of the "French forms" becomes, even if unintentionally, highly appropriate for the false pastoral of the battlefield, and one of the chief points of

"In Flanders Fields" is that pastoral conventions simply cannot be applied any longer. One of the most interesting aspects of the poem, I would also argue, is the very "demand and threat" that Crawford recoils from. Surely one of the best reasons for its effectiveness as propaganda is its barely buried exposé of the true engine of war: the poem appeals only apparently to loyalty; ultimately, it appeals to fear. And fear is why we fight. The central image is of a spectral vengeance that seems more frightening than any merely human war, and the foe seems less menacing than the potentially traitorous civilians on "our" side. The poem's readers were no doubt glad to purchase absolution from an unconfessable fear and guilt by buying indulgences in the form of Victory Bonds and British Legion poppies.

### **Sir Charles G. D. Roberts**

Another Canadian writer, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, the prolific author of animal stories, novels and novelettes, histories, translations, criticism, propaganda, and poetry, may have emulated McCrae by writing a French-form war poem: the villanelle "Going Over." McFarland does not discuss this piece, and I had never heard of it before discovering it mentioned in Vincent's article on Canadian poetry in the Great War, but it serves as a most interesting coda to the history of the French forms in the period split between high modernism and patriotic provincialism. Roberts, born in 1860, became probably the most prominent Canadian man of letters of the pre-modernist period; he was elected president of the Canadian Authors' Association in 1927, and was knighted for his literary accomplishments in 1935. Roberts's biographer John Coldwell Adams reports

that for the Canadian disciples of Imagism, Roberts came to be "the symbol of stuffiness" (185). But Adams also points out that "Roberts himself was not particularly hostile to the new experiments in poetry. He was, in fact, far more tolerant of the Canadian modernists than they were of him. His essay 'A Note on Modernism' (1931) stressed that reaction to long-established forms is both inevitable and desirable" (186). Certainly Roberts's formally experimental "Going Over" shows an early willingness to trouble the nineteenth-century forms with modernity.

Roberts's villanelle, like McCrae's rondeau, contrasts the images of pastoral with the images of trench warfare; also like "In Flanders Fields," a pre-war form seems to offer the poet a safe harbor of nostalgia from which to cautiously venture into new moral waters. In "Going Over," however, Roberts goes farther than McCrae with formal experimentation and not nearly so far with moral imperative:

A girl's voice in the night troubled my heart.  
 Across the roar of the guns, the crash of the shells,  
 Low and soft as a sigh, clearly I heard it.

Where was the broken parapet, crumbling about me?  
 Where my shadowy comrades, crouching expectant?  
 A girl's voice in the dark troubled my heart.

A dream was the ooze of the trench, the wet clay slipping,  
 A dream the sudden out-flare of the wide-flung Verys.  
 I saw but a garden of lilacs, a-flower in the dusk.

What was the sergeant saying?—I passed it along.—  
 Did I pass it along? I was breathing the breath of the lilacs.  
 For a girl's voice in the night troubled my heart.

Over! How the mud sucks! Vomits red the barrage.  
 But I am far off in the hush of a garden of lilacs.  
 For a girl's voice in the night troubled my heart.  
 Tender and soft as a sigh, clearly I heard it. (*New Poems* 41)

"Going Over" was composed in the autumn of 1918 and published in Roberts's *New Poems* in 1919; Roberts had not published a book of poetry for sixteen years, concentrating instead on prose works of fiction and nonfiction. This war villanelle stands in stark contrast to Roberts's other poetry, which is highly conventional in tone and form. The poem that immediately precedes "Going Over" in *New Poems*, for instance, is titled "The Place of His Rest," and its two final quatrains describe an idealized woman tending flowers on a grave:

See how she speeds them  
 Each childlike bloom,  
 And softly leads them  
 To tend his tomb!

The white thorn nears  
 As the cowslip goes;  
 Then the iris appears;  
 And then, the rose. (40)

Such a poem is obviously Victorian in sensibility. Yet even Roberts's other Great War poetry did not share the techniques and themes of "Going Over." Adams reports that Roberts wrote only three poems during the war:

Two of them, "To Shakespeare, 1916" and "Cambrai and Marne," were prompted by patriotism--which was seldom his best source of poetic inspiration. The third poem, 'Going Over,' records a poignant moment on the Somme when the reality of going over the parapet becomes less palpable than the soldier's dream of home. (125-6)

Both Roberts's other war poems maintain strict and conventional formal standards, often to their immediate detriment, as in the first stanza of "Cambrai and Marne": "Before our

trenches at Cambrai / We saw their columns cringe away. / We saw their masses melt and reel / Before our line of leaping steel" (42). This densely triumphant and remorselessly rhythmic heroic lyric seems more thoroughly to deserve Fussell's critique of artificially "rigorously regular" meter than "In Flanders Fields," not to mention the incendiary terms "vicious" and "stupid."

"Going Over," unlike any of Roberts's earlier verse, but like the respected work of war poets Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg, seems clearly influenced by the modernist goal of attempting to represent consciousness mimetically rather than diegetically with such technical tools such as unrhymed verse, clashing registers of diction, and fragmentary, unmediated image. The first line of the poem, "A girl's voice in the night troubled my heart," contains merely familiar poetic images of melancholy sentiment. But the poem immediately and increasingly challenges that familiar set of emotions as well as their familiar images and formulations. The summary moment comes in the first line of the quatrain, suddenly in the present tense, with an unusually blunt chop of strong stresses. The terminal sentence, "Vomits red the barrage," introduces a shockingly harsh diction that seems to parody its own poetically inverted syntax. In the subsequent lines, the smooth rhythm, soothing sibilants, long vowels, and conventionally sentimental imagery show the speaker's relapse into an escape no less urgently needed than hallucinatory at the dreadful moment of defenseless attack.

What we must understand is not only how unusual such a poem was for Roberts himself, but how original such a poem was in the history of the villanelle. Roberts anticipates many of the experiments with the form that we might assume are the



invention of post-modernism; he breaks villanelle rules that other poets would not break for decades by abandoning rhyme and meter and by varying the refrains. The recognizable shape of the villanelle alone serves as a formal anchor to the old world of sense destroyed by trench warfare. (Roberts, like many other poets of his generation, had indeed written in the French forms in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.) As I have argued, poems on serious themes or with serious, modern diction in the French forms had appeared even at the height of their ownership by *vers de société*: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "The House on the Hill" (1894) and Paul Laurence Dunbar's rondeau "We Wear the Mask" (1895) are two early examples, and even Dowson's "Villanelle of Acheron" and Stephen's villanelle attempt to achieve a tone other than melancholy sentiment, though perhaps without much success. But experimentation with the villanelle's *form*, rather than with its *tone*, was unprecedented. There had of course been the issue of whether to treat the villanelle as a stanza type or a fixed nineteen-line form, and there was also Dowson's lone example of a villanelle in iambic pentameter, but otherwise poets had collectively obeyed their own rules.<sup>77</sup> The form was a given. That Roberts's villanelle is sixteen lines rather than nineteen may only show that he was aware of the French definition of the villanelle as a stanza type, but his liberties with rhyme, meter, and with varying the refrain are remarkable and original. "Going Over," we may note, is included with only six other pieces by Roberts in *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); "In Flanders Fields" is omitted.

## Conclusion

In the nineteen-twenties, after the war, some of the French forms had another mild revival in light verse, especially with American wits; Dorothy Parker's "Rondeau Redoublé (and Scarcely Worth the Trouble, at That)" of 1922 exemplifies this phase of their history. A scholarly take on the French forms also appeared in 1922 (so, more notably, did Eliot's *The Waste Land*): Helen Cohen's *Lyric Forms from France: Their History and Use*. This work included a historical essay coupled with an essentially nostalgic anthology heavily weighted toward the late-Victorian work of such poets as Gosse, Dobson, Swinburne, Stevenson, Lang, Dowson, and Henley; Cohen thanked a still-active Edmund Gosse for his help: "I am glad to acknowledge a more personal debt to Edmund Gosse, to whose interest in this project of mine and to whose generous encouragement I owe much" (xxiii). Some verse of recent date was included: "In Flanders Fields" is given a place of honor at the very end of the lengthy section devoted to the rondeau, and a highly conventional ballade and a rondeau by Charles G. D. Roberts are included, though not "Going Over."

Other twentieth-century poets of recognizable name in Cohen's anthology included Robert Bridges, Gelett Burgess, James Branch Cabell, Don Marquis, Brander Matthews, and Louis Untermeyer: many of these poets used the forms for light verse, and their parodies stand in Cohen's anthology alongside the soulful Victorian examples they mock, though Cohen does not seem to recognize this trend toward ridicule. In summarizing the current standing of the French forms, Cohen emphasizes the primacy of the ballade and rondeau:

What Dobson, Swinburne, and Gosse intended has happened.

The ballade and the rondeau, at least, are completely acclimated.[...] The triolet is dedicated particularly to the uses of English familiar verse. Only George Macdonald and Ernest Radford have turned it to more serious account. The sestina remains an exotic. The villanelle appears to be growing in favor. (91)

If the villanelle was indeed growing in favor with serious poets, there was little proof of it in *Lyric Forms from France*. Cohen's two latest examples were comic: Louis Untermeyer's "Lugubrious Villanelle of Platitudes" and Franklin Pierce Adams's triple meter "Villanelle, with Stevenson's Assistance," a cataloguing parody on Stevenson's epigram "The world is so full of a number of things / I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings." Another late example by Rowland Thirlmere, "My Dead Dogs," does not seem to be comic--at least not intentionally:

Dear, faithful beasts who went before--  
 Who swam Death's river undismayed--  
 I'll find them on the further shore!

When Charon grimly rows me o'er  
 Vixen will bark and Jack who stayed--  
 Dear faithful beasts who went before! (438)

Cohen's 1922 survey of the French forms notwithstanding, I would argue that the villanelle was virtually underground in the period from 1900 to 1930. In that period, most of the examples of the French forms were magazine verse or light verse, wholly separate from serious literature; in the nineteenth century, the efforts of Banville and Gosse and the other post-Romantics had borne more the character of a concerted, if largely

unsuccessful, literary movement. The notoriety of "In Flanders Fields" can only have confirmed modernist disdain for the French forms, and Charles G. D. Roberts's attempt to bring the villanelle into modernity was an isolated and disregarded endeavor. Modernists, as represented here by Pound and Joyce, packed the French forms away like a grown woman packs away her dolls. But as the memory of the nineteenth-century villanelles faded, so too did the negative connotations of the villanelle form.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Grave Truths, Grave Men

Probably the best-known villanelle is Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" of 1951.<sup>78</sup> This chapter attempts to account for this famous villanelle's form in terms of the poetic culture and community in which it was written. Like previous chapters, this chapter sees a particular poem's form as the product not only of the poet's struggle for noumenal and phenomenal truth but also of the poet's struggles for livelihood and reputation in a social context. Both are valid battles, keenly felt, and every important poem bears their imprint. Obscuring the social aspects of a poem's composition and reception can lead to vague romantic illusion and overblown hagiography, whereas obscuring the purely intellectual or emotional aspects of a poem's composition and reception can lead to a snide and arid criticism. Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" flatters a king in an Italian style calculated to please the monarch, but it also captures the obsessive bewilderment of grief and loss. Théodore de Banville's "Villanelle de Buloz" is a frivolous and ephemeral taunt, but it also reminds us not to take the whole literature thing too seriously. Edmund Gosse's "Wouldst thou not be content to die" drips with bathos and trite beauties, but his efforts to introduce the French forms to English poets reflect an unprejudiced commitment to the enlargement of a xenophobic English literature. James Joyce's "Are you not weary of ardent ways" is pedestrian and juvenile compared to his adult achievements in prose, but *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* lets us see that the hour of any poem's composition is indelibly important to the poet, even if the poem is not important to anyone else nor ever again to the maturing poet.

Dylan Thomas played the role of romantic outsider to a literary set that James A. Davies describes as "incestuous" (38). In the thirties, most of the established and

emerging British poets were Oxbridge-educated; T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day-Lewis, and William Empson. Thomas, by contrast, was Welsh, poor, and under-educated. Rather like Edna St. Vincent Millay, Thomas had been dredged up from a vast slough of young poets by the equivalent of a Hollywood cattle call. He had gained his first notoriety at the age of eighteen thanks to the offices of a popular paper called the *Sunday Referee*, "a newspaper with serious pretensions trying to tap a more literary market" (Davies 25). The poetry of the Oxbridge set, though not entirely homogeneous, shared a strong emphasis on intellectualism as an appropriate response to both political and aesthetic problems. Thomas, by contrast, professed an anti-intellectual Dionysian ethic in private, in public, and in poetry.

Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London" (1945), for instance, implicitly criticizes other modern poets writing about the war:

I shall not murder  
 The mankind of her going with a grave truth  
 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath  
 With any further  
 Elegy of innocence and youth. (*Collected* 1988 86)

The poet's refusal to mourn is also a refusal to write as his peers have done--but he can hardly help it, as, we suspect, he can hardly help mourning. Indeed, "Refusal to Mourn" itself concludes with something that might easily be called a "grave truth": "After the first death, there is no other." And of course the mortal pun on "grave" is meant, and will recur in "Do not go gentle into that good night," which speaks of "Grave men, near death." The pun echoes wounded Mercutio's "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man." Thomas himself was something of a Mercutio figure, scoffing and romping through the tragedy of modern poetry declaiming the occasional faery vision. He was

especially wont to play the role of the anti-intellectual adolescent, treating other poets even of his own generation as portentous, portly elders. The alphabetical simplicity of the rhyme scheme of "Refusal to Mourn" (abcabc defdef ghighi jkljkl) seems itself a child's rebuke of adult convolution.

But Thomas was not really such an outsider to that incestuous literary coterie, nor was Thomas's poetry so different from theirs. Like Auden, Thomas paid careful attention to rhyme and meter, making full use of the new freedom to use slant rhyme and novel nonce schemes; like Empson, Thomas privileged sound over semantic clarity. For Empson, Auden, Thomas (and for other poets such as Elizabeth Bishop, who wrote her first villanelle in 1950, and Weldon Kees, who published five villanelles in his 1947 *The Fall of the Magicians*), the desire to write a villanelle was only one manifestation of a more general formalism. This formalism, even Thomas's, was essentially part of the tendency toward intellectualism that was characteristic of the period, an intellectualism that was itself an attempt to impose order upon the disarray of the twentieth century.<sup>79</sup> In the thirties, Auden and other young intellectuals had been attracted to Communism because it was a political philosophy that promised to order society rationally. In the same period, Empson, influenced by I. A. Richards's brand of practical criticism, founded a "scientific method" for the study of literature that held sway in the form of New Criticism for decades. He was also instrumental in reevaluating the Metaphysicals, whose abstruse images and techniques had long been out of favor.

The villanelle at mid-century amounted to a pet of Empson's, a nonce revival--but the members of the dominant poetic culture, not excluding Dylan Thomas, were so close to one another that they passed their bugs around like kindergarteners. As the notes to the

1988 edition of Thomas's *Collected Poems* remark: "The villanelle form for the poem ["Do not go gentle into that good night"] is something Thomas would have picked up from William Empson, if nowhere else" (256). This erratic viral character of the villanelle was new: in the nineteenth century, the villanelle had been systematically wielded in certain well-defined literary arguments; in the period of high modernism, the villanelle had been systematically ignored except by backward provincials and amateurs. In the thirties, forties, and fifties, the villanelle had been all but stripped of signification. The Parnassians were no longer an issue. William Empson's sudden adoption of the form was apparently entirely idiosyncratic, and he did not attempt a programmatic resuscitation of the villanelle. But then, as Stephen Spender remarked in 1946, the poets of the thirties "were not in a deliberate sense a literary movement; they were rather a group of friends, contemporaries at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, influenced by each other in a personal way" (qtd. in Firchow 83). This personal influence is the context for the minor revival of the villanelle at mid-century, a revival that was anchored by Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night."

## William Empson

William Empson, who almost single-handedly smuggled the villanelle into serious twentieth-century poetry, seems from the beginning to have regarded the form purely in the abstract. He looked on its beauty bare of post-Romantic associations; for him, the villanelle was A'bA" abA' abA" abA' abA" abA'A" rather than "Wouldst thou not be content to die." Born in 1906, Empson did not belong to a generation that personally remembered the late-nineteenth-century apex of the French forms; it is most



likely that he learned of the form from the perfunctory outline of a poetry handbook. As Philip and Averil Gardner note, Empson's three villanelles seem highly original, entirely new; they do not seem to have any relationship, even a negative one, to the post-romantic villanelles:

Empson is more associated with the villanelle (and for that matter the terza rima) than is any other twentieth-century poet; significantly, it is in this form that any parodies of him have been composed [...]. What prompted Empson to adopt this early French verse-form is not clear, though its technical rigour--its alternating refrains and its two rhyme-sounds stretched over nineteen lines--was no doubt a challenge. As is made clear by comparison with nineteenth-century practitioners of the villanelle, Austin Dobson, Wilde and Dowson, Empson's specimen is very much his own. (90)

Empson's first villanelle was published in 1928 in the *Cambridge Review*, while he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. Just afterward, in 1929, Empson wrote the landmark critical work *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). *Seven Types of Ambiguity* shows no sign that Empson had been reading *vers de société*--nor *Portrait of the Artist*, for that matter--though certainly the work reveals that his reading was wide and varied. With as much aplomb as he discusses the works of Milton, Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, Johnson, Pope, Keats, Hopkins, and other canonical figures, Empson discusses Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* and "a poem about strawberries in *Punch* a year or two ago, which I caught myself liking because of a subdued pun" (176-7, 64-5). Empson also discusses Sidney's double sestina "Ye Goat-Herd Gods" in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* with some

interest in its then-unusual form, "so curiously foreign to the normal modes or later developments of the language" (34). But Empson never seems to have mentioned in print what he found to interest him in the villanelle; a projected biography by John Haffenden, if it appears, may help answer the question.

Empson had studied mathematics before turning to English literature under the tutelage of I. A. Richards, and his training in (or natural attraction to) equations and permutations colored both his poetry and his criticism. Empson's embrace of the villanelle must be attributed, for lack of other evidence, to this mathematical-scientific element in his makeup. Other poets have been tempted by the "challenge" of the villanelle's "technical rigour," but surely no poet has expressed fascination with the logic of contradiction (an issue pertinent to the bisected refrain of the villanelle) quite in the way Empson does:

Grammatical machinery may be assumed which would make the contradiction into two statements; thus ' $p$  and  $-p$ ' may mean: 'If  $\alpha=a_1$ , then  $p$ ; if  $\alpha=a_2$ , then  $-p$ . [...] If ' $p$  and  $-p$ ' could only be resolved in one way into: 'If  $\alpha=a_1$ , then  $p$ ; if  $\alpha=a_2$ , then  $p$ ,' it would at least put two statements into one. In many cases the subsidiary uses of language limit very sharply the possible interpretations, and the ambiguity is only of this sensible sort. But it is evident that any degree of complexity of meaning can be extracted by 'interpreting' a contradiction; any  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  may be selected, that can be attached to some  $\alpha$  arising out of  $p$ ; and any such pair may then be read the other way round, as 'If  $\alpha_1=\alpha_2$ , then  $p$ ; if  $\alpha=\alpha_1$ , then  $-p$ .' The original contradiction has thus been resolved into an indefinite number of

contradictions: 'If  $\alpha = \neg \alpha$ , then  $p$  and  $\neg p$ ,' to each of which the same process may again be applied. (196-7)

While this passage is hardly representative of Empson's usual vigorous and casual critical voice, it does reflect an irrepressible devotion to abstract constructions.

Empson's early poetry, like his criticism, startled some critics into admiration and others into ridicule with its occasional or sustained referential obscurity. "Villanelle" ("It is the pain, it is the pain, endures"), like Empson's other early poetry, emphasizes effects of rhythm, sound, and suggestively specialized vocabulary ("chemic," "toxin") rather than semantic transparency:

It is the pain, it is the pain, endures.  
Your chemic beauty burned my muscles through.  
Poise of my hands reminded me of yours.

What later purge from this deep toxin cures?  
What kindness now could the old salve renew?  
It is the pain, it is the pain, endures.

The infection slept (custom or change inures)  
And when pain's secondary phase was due  
Poise of my hands reminded me of yours.

How safe I felt, whom memory assures,  
Rich that your grace safely by heart I knew.  
It is the pain, it is the pain, endures.

My stare drank deep beauty that still allures.  
My heart pumps yet the poison draught of you.  
Poise of my hands reminded me of yours.

You are still kind whom the same shape immures.  
Kind and beyond adieu. We miss our cue.  
It is the pain, it is the pain, endures.  
Poise of my hands reminded me of yours. (*Collected 22*)

"Villanelle," like Empson's other villanelles, is iambic pentameter, indicating either that Empson was making a conscious attempt to increase the gravity of the villanelle or that

he was simply not familiar with the nineteenth-century tetrameter examples and therefore adopted the most usual sonnet meter. "Villanelle" was included in Empson's first volume of verse, published in 1935; his second volume, *The Gathering Storm*, appeared five years later, in 1940, and included two more villanelles: "Missing Dates" and "Reflection from Anita Loos." These two volumes would constitute most of the poetry Empson would write in his lifetime; John Willis points out that "his reputation as a poet now rests on a body of work largely completed by 1940" (5).

That Empson titled his first villanelle "Villanelle" probably indicates that the form would not have been immediately recognizable even to his Oxbridge peers--though of course a large percentage of nineteenth-century villanelles had also identified themselves in this way, and many do still, though the practice has declined with the increasing celebrity of the form. Definitions of the villanelle did continue to appear in poetry handbooks throughout the period, but these token entries could easily have remained unremarked even by those most active in contemporary poetry--and the villanelle had never been the best-known of the French forms. As late as 1940, one haughty *Scrutiny* reviewer of Empson's *The Gathering Storm* seemed not to have heard of the villanelle at all, recognizing "Reflection from Anita Loos" only as something "triolet-like" and apparently not realizing that the spare rhyme scheme of "Missing Dates" (whether well-done or not) was a pre-established requirement of the fixed form:

The degeneration is perhaps more obvious in Mr. Empson's habit of giving his verses an appearance of coherence and concentration by the device of a triolet-like repetition of lines (*cf. Aubade, Success, Reflection from Anita Loos*). [...] Similarly, in *Missing Dates*, the single rhyme, often

unconvincingly forced, is presumably intended to represent the insidiousness and the tediousness of 'the waste that kills.' (Constable 110)

Most other contemporary reviews of Empson's books of poetry ignored Empson's three villanelles, commenting neither on their substance nor on their form. An exception was a review in the journal *Accent* by Richard Eberhart; Eberhart briefly noted that Empson "dignified the villanelle form with serious import" (Constable 152).<sup>80</sup> In general, however, contemporary reviews focused on his contribution (or crime) as a poet of puzzling obscurity and scientific imagery rather than as a advocate of any particular brand of poetic form.<sup>81</sup>

Empson, indeed, never claimed to sponsor any intellectual or poetic movement. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was widely credited with launching the New Criticism, yet Empson never identified himself with the school and often ignored it or mildly disparaged it. As a critic-poet, Empson was the diametrical opposite of Gosse in that he never used his criticism to outline a manifesto of what poetry should be and never used his own poetry to exemplify his criticism. His poetry and his criticism seemed to exist in parallel. Empson's critical method was to seek out and exhaustively explicate ambiguity and complexity in others' poetry--but, as he famously said to I. A. Richards, "You could do that with any poetry, couldn't you?" (qtd. in Gill 5). His own poetry, certainly, was ambiguous and complex, but Empson never "called for" any particular kind of contemporary poetry, let alone a kind that would resemble his own.

Still, those who knew him almost inevitably remark on the enormous influence he exerted, seemingly almost involuntarily. He apparently attracted imitators not by advertising for disciples and converts, but by pursuing his own course without reference

to predecessors or posterity. Kathleen Raine, who knew him at Cambridge, memorably describes this *sui generis* aspect of his personality:

I remember the impression he made upon me--as upon all of us--of contained mental energy, as of a flame whose outline remains constant while its substance is undergoing continual metamorphosis at a temperature at which only intellectual salamanders could hope to live. This impression of perpetual self-consuming self-generating mental intensity produced a kind of shock; through no intention or will to impress; for William was simply himself at all times. [...] Never I think had he any wish to excel, lead, dominate, involve, or otherwise assert power; he was at all times, on the contrary, mild, impersonal, indifferent to the impression he made to the point of absent-mindedness. Nevertheless his presence spellbound us all. (Gill 15)

Empson never trumpeted the virtues of the villanelle in print, nor even explained his interest in the form, not even in the garrulous footnotes he included in the 1949 edition of his *Collected Poems*. His returns to it, then, bore at first only the character of a personal oddity.

## W. H. Auden

W. H. Auden took up Empson's quirk. Auden and Empson were friends, of course, and almost exact contemporaries--less than six months separated them in age. In the winter of 1939 Auden lent Empson some money to enable him to travel back to England after the outbreak of the Great War, which was a truer indicator of their

relationship than might be deduced from Empson's 1940 satiric poem titled "Just a Smack at Auden."<sup>82</sup> Empson's smack made mild fun of Auden's leftist politics and the Marxist concept of historical determinism: "What was said by Marx, boys, what did he perpend? / No good being sparks, boys, waiting for the end" (*Collected* 62).

Unfazed by such ribbing, Auden tried on Empson's signature form shortly after the appearance of *The Gathering Storm*. He published two villanelles in journals early in 1941: "But I Can't" (also known as "If I Could Tell You") and "Are You There" (also known as "Alone").<sup>83</sup> Both are iambic pentameter. "Are You There" is distinctive in that it is the first villanelle (but by no means the last) to substitute repetend for refrain, with only the end-words "own" and "alone" recurring in the refrain lines. For this reason Auden's commentator John Fuller calls the poem a "pseudo-villanelle" (393). The use of repetend rather than refrain in the villanelle would not become popular for several decades; most of the mid-century villanelles still maintain uniform or only slightly varied refrains. Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art," not Auden's "Are You There," surely initiated the current proliferation of repetend-villanelles--although it is likely that Bishop herself was highly influenced by Auden and the experimental formalism of the mid-century poets.

Auden used the villanelle form again two or three years later in his long work *The Sea and the Mirror* (1944), a sustained reflection on the relationship between life and art as embodied in dramatic monologues spoken by the characters of *The Tempest*.<sup>84</sup> *The Sea and the Mirror* (like much of Auden's early work) is a pastiche that is thematically concerned with art, form, style; therefore tortuous Sebastian speaks in a sestina, the lover Ferdinand in a sonnet, and materialist Stephano in a ballade. Caliban, finally, ends the

piece with a discourse in ironically elaborate Jamesian prose. Miranda, the innocent maiden, speaks in a villanelle:

My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,  
As the poor and sad are real to the good king,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

Up jumped the Black Man behind the elder tree,  
Turned a somersault and ran away waving;  
My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely.

The Witch gave a squawk; her venomous body  
Melted into light as water leaves a spring,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

At his crossroads, too, the Ancient prayed for me;  
Down his wasted cheeks tears of joy were running:  
My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely.

He kissed me awake, and no one was sorry;  
The sun shone on sails, eyes, pebbles, anything,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

So, to remember our changing garden, we  
Are linked as children in a circle dancing:  
My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea. (*Sea* 25-6)

"Miranda's Song," as this lyric is usually called, is the only villanelle from the mid-century period that may reflect some awareness of the villanelles of the preceding century. Miranda's vision of love is that of the ideal Victorian woman as venerated by Austin Dobson. Naïve, narrow, and narcissistic, she lives only for love; that her Dear One is hers is the beginning and end of her knowledge. She imagines that all nature collaborates with her love and that its power defeats monsters such as the Black Man and the Witch. Prospero, elsewhere in *The Sea and the Mirror*, calls Miranda a "silly lovesick little goose," and this judgment is implicit in the fruitless stasis of Miranda's imagination (*Sea* 9). The only landscape she envisions is the high green hill sitting always by the sea,



and the only future she envisions for herself is to sit always by her lover. Miranda is a mirror in herself, and so is Ferdinand: they reflect each other and nothing else in an infinitely lonely infinite regress. Auden reshapes the villanelle's expected rhymes in "Miranda's Song," just as he had reshaped the villanelle's expected refrains in "Are You There"; innovatively and appropriately, the rhymes in "Miranda's Song" are light rhymes, insubstantial but stubborn.

Empson and Auden shared an intellectual approach to the villanelle; for both poets, the form presented certain possibilities in and of itself apart from any previous incarnation. In contrast to the more explicit and factional admiration of the form exhibited by nineteenth-century post-Romantics, Empson and Auden seem merely to have experimented with the form in an almost hypothetical way. Dylan Thomas would eventually do the same.

### **Dylan Thomas: *The Death of the King's Canary***

Dylan Thomas's first villanelle--his only other villanelle besides "Do not go gentle into that good night"--was a parody of William Empson titled "Request to Leda," composed for a novel titled *The Death of the King's Canary*. Like Auden and Empson, Thomas and Empson were friends; in 1936 the twenty-one-year-old Thomas was having "Nights Out" with "old Bill Empson," who was a dozen years older than he was, and who had just given his poetry a rave review (Thomas, *Letters* 222). Friendship and favorable criticism, however, did not deter Thomas from parodying Empson's poetry, just as it had not deterred Empson from poking fun at Auden. Friendly rivalries, debates, satires, and

even insults were a hallmark of the mid-century poetic culture, and much of this signifying was done in print.

In a 1938 letter Thomas characterized the poets of his generation as "New-Versers, intellectual muckpots leaning on a theory, post-surrealists and orgasmists, tit-in-the-night whistlers and Barkers, Empson leaning over his teeth to stare down an ice-cold throat at the mathematical mystery of his doom-treading boots, Grigson leaning over his rackets to look at his balls, Cameron riding on the back of neat graves" (*Letters* 311). In 1940, he was at work on a book that would flesh out these judgments at length. Thomas began collaborating in that year with his friend John Davenport on *The Death of the King's Canary*, a mock-detective novel satirizing modern British poetry and poets. Thomas had originally conceived of the novel several years earlier, and had had two previous collaborators before Davenport, but the whole manuscript would not be finished until 1941. The book, which might well have laid Thomas and Davenport open to legal action, remained unpublished until 1976.

Several modern poets, including Thomas himself, are caricatured in the narrative of *The Death of the King's Canary*, but it is the first chapter that contains the core of the humor: the verse parodies. The novel begins with a harassed Prime Minister suddenly saddled with the task of choosing a new Poet Laureate (hence the "King's Canary"). The Prime Minister, who "did not read much English poetry later than Pope, although he admired Tennyson's ear," is a typically unimaginative and hidebound member of the English gentry--but the modern poetry he is suddenly required to read looks even more foolish than he does (2). Author by author, school by school, Thomas and Davenport send up the contemporary poets. At the end of the chapter, after a hasty and horrified

evening of reading, the Prime Minister chooses to bestow the Laureate on a caricature of Dylan Thomas himself on the basis of a poetic parody that the Prime Minister does not recognize as parody.

The first poem encountered by the Prime Minister is titled "Lamentable Ode," by "Albert Ponting," author of a volume titled "Claustrophosexannal." "Lamentable Ode" reads in part:

The urge of the purge of the womb of the worm  
 I renege in the flail-like failing of  
 The detumescent sun.  
 This my crepuscular palimpsest is:  
 I am so greatly him that lazarhouses and such  
 Lascivious lodges of the unloved  
 Peel like pomegranates at my nasal touch  
 And Balham faints in a scalecophidian void. (3)

This was a sesquipedalian smack at Surrealism. The particular Surrealist poet lampooned might be David Gascoyne, whom Thomas had also mocked in his poem "A Letter to My Aunt Discussing the Correct Approach to Modern Poetry": "Fie on you, aunt, that you should see / No genius in David G." (*The Poems* 83). The target might instead (or also) be George Barker, another Surrealist ("tit-in-the-night whistlers and Barkers"), whose 1937 *Calamiterror* could have inspired the portmanteau coinage "Claustrophosexannal."

Too-Celtic imitators of Yeats are swatted with a deft hand, and patriotic poets are spattered across the windshield in a poem called "All Honour and Glory," which ends in a paean to "English dawns, plashy with English dew, / And English water-wagtails on English lawns, / And Englishmen walking in the English way / In England ..." (18). Wystan Hugh Auden the inveterate *pasticheur* becomes "Wyndham Nils Snowden," the author of a volume that "seemed to consist of a series of conversations; or rather, a series of lectures. They were all addressed to other, dead, writers. There was a long squabble

with a tongue-tied Spenser in the metre of the *Faerie Queene*; a rap on the knuckles for Scott in the metre of *Marmion*" (9). T. S. Eliot is let off more lightly in a parody of "The Hollow Men" titled "West Abelard" that includes the lines "Even the end is similar. It ends / and there's an end," concluding "It is not different and it is better / that so it should be. / Everything is the same" (16). Even the dim Prime Minister is moved by this: "He felt queerly depressed, and reached once more for the brandy. [...] That *was* a lugubrious poem; and the trouble was that it was true. Everything *was* the same. Dull, too. But it would never do to tell them so" (17).

Of Stephen Spender's war poetry, described as a bit "red" by the Prime Minister's secretary, the Prime Minister wonders, "What did red mean? Surely that adolescent indignation wasn't so very alarming? The poems were full of gasworks and power stations, and bewildered boys" (13). A representative stanza from the Spender parody, titled "The Parachutist," describes with idiotically saturated sympathy a German soldier who has just parachuted into England:

Now these once loving-kindly hands  
Cherished, like an adder picked up on a walk,  
A tommy gun, cold threat to love in steel:  
Icarus he stands; his silken clouds of glory  
Trailing behind him--a bird's broken wing--  
Still trembling from his fallen angel's flight  
Down the sky weeping death. (14)

Andrew Lycett, the author of *Dylan Thomas: A New Life* (2004), describes young Oxford's reaction to this parody:

At the start of the Second World War, Oxford poets such as Sidney Keyes regarded Dylan Thomas as a welcome antidote to Auden and his circle. They invited him to address the University English Club, an undergraduate society, in November 1941. Thomas had been working with John Davenport on a novel, *The Death of the King's Canary*, which interwove an unlikely story about the murder of the poet laureate with

brilliant parodies of contemporary poets. Philip Larkin noted appreciatively: "Hell of a fine man: little, snubby, hopelessly pissed bloke who made hundreds of cracks and read parodies of everybody in appropriate voices. He remarked, 'I'd like to have talked about a book of poems I've been given to review, a young poet called Rupert Brooke--it's surprising how he has been influenced by Stephen Spender.' There was a moment of delighted surprise, then a roar of laughter. Then he read a parody of Spender entitled *The Parachutist* which had people rolling on the floor." (Lycett URL)

Thomas's parody of Empson, as it turned out, was the only part of *The Death of the King's Canary* to be published in Thomas's lifetime; it appeared in the journal *Horizon* in 1942 with the epigraph "Homage to William Empson." Titled "Request to Leda," the poem parodies Empson's most immediately recognizable poetic traits: his semantic opacity, his predilection for scientific images and vocabulary, and his affection for the villanelle:

Not your winged lust but his must now change suit.  
The harp-waked Casanova rakes no range.  
The worm is (pin-point) rational in the fruit.

Not girl for bird (gourd being man) breaks root.  
Taking no plume for index in love's change.  
Not your winged lust but his must now change suit.

Desire is phosphorous: the chemic bruit  
Lust bears like volts, who'll amplify, and strange  
The worm is (pin-point) rational in the fruit.<sup>85</sup>

"Was it the brandy or was he losing his reason?" thinks the hapless Prime Minister after reading "Request to Leda." "He had always been terrified of going out of his mind. It had happened to so many of his colleagues. He concentrated hard, but it was no good: the rest of the poem was just as obscure. It looked clear enough, too" (19).

Bereft of the Prime Minister's gloss and of the aggregate hilarity of the other verse parodies in *The Death of the King's Canary*, the poem as published in *Horizon* loses

much of its comic power. No doubt the "appropriate voices" that Thomas adopted in live readings were also necessary to appreciate the parody fully. Read thus out of context, it might even be difficult to recognize "Request to Leda" as a parody. Thomas's own early poetry, like Empson's, had been open to the charge of obscurity; Stephen Spender wrote that Thomas's early work had seemed to be that of "another 'opaque' poet"; a reviewer of the first book-length study on Thomas asserted that obscurity was Thomas's "most obvious quality"; and a school friend of Thomas's described his early work as "verse of the kind which many people can't understand" (qtd. in Davies 295, 296, 19). The first stanza of "I fellowed sleep," from Thomas's first book, *18 Poems* (1934), may illustrate this quality:

I fellowed sleep who kissed me in the brain,  
 Let fall the tear of time; the sleeper's eye,  
 Shifting to light, turned on me like a moon.  
 So, 'planing-heeled, I flew along my man  
 And dropped on dreaming and the upward sky.

Thomas's mechanical imagery in early poems such as "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower" and "When once the twilight locks no longer," too, parallels Empson's scientific vocabularies as well as Spender's "gasworks and power stations"; all were attempts to introduce metaphors of technologized modernity into poetry. Karl Miller notes of Thomas and Empson, "I believe that I now see resemblances between the two of them (say, between the *Eighteen Poems* and an Empson poem like 'The Scales') which I was not aware of in the forties, my frantic youth, when Thomas seemed a working-class Dionysus come out of the West and Empson seemed like the ancient universities" (Gill 43).

The resemblance between Empson's poetry and Thomas's may have been a case of direct influence, in fact. One prominent word in Empson's "Villanelle" of 1928 is the unusual adjective "chemic," which Thomas repeats in the 1942 "Request to Leda"-- another arrow aimed at the recognizable target. But a 1934 piece by Thomas, "Especially when the October wind," had used the word "chemic" unironically in its final stanza:

Especially when the October wind  
 (Some let me make you of autumnal spells,  
 The spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales)  
 With fists of turnips punishes the land,  
 Some let me make of you the heartless words.  
 The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry  
 Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury.  
 By the sea's side hear the dark-vowelled birds. (*Collected* 19)

In Empson's "Villanelle," the word had been used in the first stanza: "It is the pain, it is the pain, endures. / Your chemic beauty burned my muscles through. / Poise of my hands reminded me of yours" (*Collected* 22). Thomas probably would not have seen "Villanelle" when it was first printed in the *Cambridge Review*, but Empson's first villanelle had also appeared in at least two well-known anthologies before Thomas's poem appeared: *Cambridge Poetry 1929* (1929) and *Recent Poetry 1923-1933* (1933).<sup>86</sup> Both Empson and Thomas seem to be using the word in several senses at once, like good disciples of ambiguity. The primary sense for Empson seems to be "harsh substance," however. His love's beauty burns through muscle. The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that "chemic" is the name given to both "A bleacher's name for chloride of lime as a chemical bleaching agent" and "A dye consisting of a very acid solution of indigo in sulphuric acid." The *OED* tells us that the word can also refer both to alchemy and to chemistry, the alchemical and the chemical, and both the ancient and the modern transmutative connotations are probably at work in both "Villanelle" and "Especially

when the October wind"--though Thomas's choice of the word "chemic" seems less grounded in phenomenal, observed reality than Empson's, which may be another indicator that it is a borrowed word.

According to Constantine Fitzgibbon's introduction to *The Death of the King's Canary*, "Dylan Thomas maintained that Davenport had written most of the verse parodies. This may well be untrue, for if Dylan was not proud of them, he would have given their authorship to John. Others have said that their skill is far beyond what were Davenport's capacities" (x). Obviously the Empson parody was Thomas's, since he published it; he did also lay claim at least once to "The Parachutist," as we have seen. Thomas might well have later denied authorship of the verse parodies in *The Death of the King's Canary* not because they were bad, but because they were a little too good. It may be that his clear-sighted recognition of the faults of his contemporaries was matched with a too-clear recognition that his own verse too often shared many of the same faults, and this comparison would undoubtedly have contributed to the lyrical paralysis Thomas notoriously suffered from, especially after 1945. Empson was not the only poet whose work may have seemed too close to Thomas's own. The Surrealist parody "Lamentable Ode," for instance, makes heavy use of alliteration, internal rhyme, and consonance, piling comically excessive sound effects one upon the other in phrases such as "flail-like failing" and "The urge of the purge of the womb of the worm." To a lesser extent Thomas's own poetry--often equally baffling, semantically--depended on such acoustic elements for much of its power. "Womb of the worm," moreover, is a particularly Thomasish phrase; the word "womb" recurs so frequently in Thomas's poetry that detractors have characterized him as the "womb and tomb" poet.



That Thomas used the villanelle to parody Empson is not at all remarkable; it was perfectly in keeping with his wild-child "welcome antidote" role. What is more surprising, or ought to be, is that Thomas returned to the form unironically. Thomas was clearly not as different from the poets he satirized in *The Death of the King's Canary* as he might have wished, and he may have begun to realize it by 1951. "Do not go gentle into that good night" also indicates that Thomas, like Empson and Auden, regarded the form in the abstract, separate from any acquired connotation. The villanelle's associations with Parnassian prosodic rivalries, France and Frenchness, queer sexualities, chivalric values, moonlight and maidens, the naïve, the decadent, the trifling had lost their power, and even the villanelle's new character as a risible foible of Empson's did not last.

### **Dylan Thomas: "Do not go gentle into that good night"**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1951, Thomas sent "Do not go gentle into that good night" to his friend Princess Marguerite Caetani, founder and editor of the journal *Botteghe Oscure*. "I have just finished the short poem I enclose," he wrote, adding a brief despondent postscript: "The only person I can't show the little enclosed poem to is, of course, my father, who doesn't know he's dying" (*Letters* 800):

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. (*Collected* 148)

Some speculate that Thomas may have begun "Do not go gentle into that good night" in 1945, when his father's ill-health first began to seem serious, but there is little reason (other than a somewhat inflated contemporary estimate of how difficult it is to write a villanelle) to suppose that Thomas took six years to write his famous villanelle.<sup>87</sup> Walford and Maud, editors of the *Collected Poems*, remark that "It is not a poem that was written quickly, one suspects."<sup>88</sup> Yet Thomas's repeated introduction of diminutives to describe "Do not go gentle" ("the short poem," "the little enclosed poem") imply a certain embarrassment, indicating that he might not consider the piece to be as highly-polished as some of his other works. He suggested to Princess Caetani that it be published with "Lament," which he described as "rough," referring either to its coarse content or to its degree of incompleteness or to both. (*Letters* 800). "Poem on His Birthday," by contrast, had taken Thomas almost two years to complete, and in July 1951 he called the nearly-finished hundred-and-seven-line birthday poem "a much, much better poem than the 'Lament' and the villanelle to my father" (*Letters* 800, 802). "Do not go gentle into that good night," moreover, shares a remarkable number of its key words with "Poem on His Birthday," which was written between October 1949 and August 1951: "bay," "blind,"

"rage," "bless," "waves," "dark," "light," "sun," "green." Many of these words recur throughout Thomas's *oeuvre*, of course; the word "green" figures prominently in his poetry as early as 1933 in "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower." But it nevertheless seems likely that Thomas began "Do not go gentle into that good night" about 1949 or 1950.

On March 9, 1950, Dylan Thomas went to the Library of Congress to make archival recordings of some of his poems; there he met Elizabeth Bishop, who was then the Library of Congress's Consultant in Poetry.<sup>89</sup> Bishop wrote her first known villanelle, the unpublished "Verdigris," sometime in 1949; the refrains run, "The catalogues will tell you that they mean / The time to watch for is when Time grows green." It is tempting, though perhaps extravagant, to imagine that the villanelle germ had been communicated from one poet to the other when they met at the Library of Congress. Perhaps Thomas told Bishop he was writing a villanelle; perhaps Bishop told Thomas she was writing a villanelle--there is no telling which way the influence ran, if there was indeed such an influence. Bishop's biographer Brett C. Millier quotes her unpublished journals on the subject of "Verdigris" and speculates on the possible influence of Thomas:

A few months earlier, she had seen moss growing on the façade of the post office building in Washington. "Quite bright green.--How wonderful this place would look if all the facades were like that. (Ver-de-gris--one definition is vers de Greece) (Those green green roses in the Freer) (Time is sometimes green--I want to write a villanelle & that sounds like a possibility.)" [...] She had Dylan Thomas on her mind at this time, perhaps 'Fern Hill' specifically. (224)

The words "time" and "green," so important in "Verdigris," are also particularly prominent in "Fern Hill" (1946), Thomas's nostalgic poem about the idyll of childhood. Both words recur throughout the "Fern Hill" until the poem's final "grave truth" brings the two key concepts into relationship: "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea" (*Collected* 135). In 1963 or 1964 Bishop again attempted to write a villanelle, which Millier describes as "an ambitious villanelle about an aviary in the rain, with these unwieldy rhymes: fiduciary, subsidiary, sumptuary, and beneficiary" (347). The aviary villanelle, too, like so many of Bishop's poems, remained unpublished, and it was not until the fall of 1975 that Bishop achieved her objective of writing a villanelle: "One Art."

Notably, Bishop writes, "I want to write a villanelle & that sounds like a possibility," not "I want to write about Time growing green and I think the villanelle might be the best form to express the idea." The latter would probably also have been true enough. But Bishop's notebook entry raises a question: Which formulation would describe the impulse behind "Do not go gentle into that good night"? Would Dylan Thomas have put the poem's subject or its form first in a narrative of its origin? Commentators, at least, have almost always treated "Do not go gentle into that good night" as though its primary (if not sole) trigger was the illness of Dylan Thomas's father, D. J. Thomas. It would be foolish to deny that Thomas wanted to write about his father's illness and death and that this desire resulted in both "Do not go gentle into that good night" and the later "Elegy" (1952). Still, we should take seriously the motive of "wanting to write a villanelle."

Apart from any relationship of particular matter to particular form, why might Thomas have wanted to write a villanelle? Nineteenth-century poets who wanted to write a villanelle had generally had particular aesthetic agendas in mind. Wanting to write a villanelle for French poets was then the same as wanting to "burst open the ancient oyster of the Alexandrine," as Gautier put it; for British poets, wanting to write a villanelle was then the same as wanting to introduce "naïve grace" or the "exotic" into the poetry of Victorian Britain. Joyce and Pound in the earlier decades of the twentieth century had alluded to the villanelle only to repudiate such ineffective and outgrown impulses with proper scorn. With the fading of these aesthetic debates, writing a villanelle ceased to be a sectarian activity. Empson, Auden, Thomas, and finally Bishop might more truly be said to have demonstrated the range of the villanelle, as McFarland puts it, than Pound and Joyce--but the reputation of the form was not a serious concern for them, as it had been for the post-Romantic poets and their modernist conquerors, and as it would be again in nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties in the debates sparked by New Formalism (96). The mid-century poets approached the form ahistorically and apolitically.

The chief reason that mid-century modernists wanted to write villanelles was to demonstrate their own technical mastery. This shared impulse did not have the exact character of a movement because it was purely individualist. At the same time, it did reflect an underlying premise: that the solitary poet's job is to impose order upon, or at least reveal order within, a reality whose central characteristic is disorder--chaos, mess, modernity, emotion, life. The key word for this mid-century approach to politics, criticism, and poetry is "master," as in "Master of Arts," or as in the famous opening

"grave truth" of Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1940): "About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters" (*Collected* 1945 3). The mid-century poets themselves aspired to such consummate infallibility. Technical mastery, for the mid-century modernists, amounted to a metaphor for or signifier of the intellectual and emotional mastery of the poet over existential uncertainties. Auden also imposed order on his life; his biographer Humphrey Carpenter writes that around 1940, "He was in fact beginning to become obsessive about his timetable. Certain hours were fixed for writing, certain hours for reading, certain points of the day for eating, and certain times for receiving his friends or going out. Interruptions of this schedule were treated with ill-concealed irritation, and friends quickly learnt not to bother him except at the permitted hours" (279). Eventually Auden would return to Christianity as the most stable of philosophical ordering systems.<sup>90</sup> For Auden the source of disorder was in the external world of society, politics, war, suffering, his faithless lover; for Thomas the source of disorder was himself.

Accepting the idea of Dylan Thomas's rapport with order and mastery is complicated by our knowledge of his chaotic and inept life, but not at all by our knowledge of his poetry.<sup>91</sup> His tone is as authoritative as Auden's (those "grave truths"), and his intricate and conspicuous technical embellishments demand as much admiration from the reader as do Auden's quieter but equally meticulous (or obsessive) technical devices. Particularly in his last poems, Thomas was setting himself complicated formal challenges, and his adoption of the villanelle form for "Do not go gentle into that good night" seems to be part of this drive. Of his last completed poem, the verse prologue to his *Collected Poems*, Thomas wrote in September 1952, "To begin with, I set myself,

foolishly perhaps, a most difficult technical task: The Prologue is in two verses--in my manuscript, a verse to a page--of 51 lines each. And the second verse rhymes *backward* with the first. The first & last lines of the poem rhyme; the second and the last but one; & so on & so on. Why I acrosticked myself like this, don't ask me" (*Letters* 838). Critics such as R. B. Kershner and John Ackerman have attributed Thomas's technical elaborations to the influence of the Welsh bardic tradition, but Thomas himself (who did not speak Welsh) generally denied this influence, and many Welsh critics considered Thomas to have been corrupted past repair by English poetry.<sup>92</sup>

Such self-acrosticking might also be described as obsessive, a term implying that elaborate poetic form can represent an attempt to gain control over a perceived threat. Of "Prologue's" various technical excesses Davies writes, "It is as if Thomas, in poor health, dragged down by drink, possibly drying up as a poet, is saying to his readers, 'Look what I can still do!'" (213). Certainly after World War Two both Thomas's art and his private affairs seemed to be in ever-greater danger of complete disintegration. Love, money, family, health, reputation: Thomas had serious trouble with them all in the years 1950 to 1953, as the many biographies of him recount in relished or fastidious detail.<sup>93</sup> Only Thomas's live and recorded readings were going relatively well. Perhaps most worrisome of all, Thomas had long been struggling to finish writing projects: he had reneged on promises to publishers, to journals, to the BBC, and many therefore refused to advance him money or refused to work with him at all. In 1953, he wrote crazily away at his play *Under Milk Wood* until just before the curtain lifted for the first performance, "concocting the play's ending at the last moment" (Davies 96). In one of the many letters Thomas wrote apologizing profusely for not delivering manuscript when promised, he

averred that "the confused symbols grow leaden and a woolly rust grows over the words [...]. The symbols have wet-brain, the words have swallowed their tongues" (*Letters* 844).

One of Thomas's customary solutions to such moldering was to return to his earlier works and revise or recycle them. When younger he had had the habit of returning for inspiration to the notebooks he had written at the age of eighteen, in what seemed to be the least labored episode of composition of his life. Some of Thomas's poetry, as a result, has almost the character of self-plagiarism or self-parody: we remember those uncomfortably brilliant parodies in *The Death of the King's Canary* that Thomas would not acknowledge. Even the aural progression of "age" to "rave" to "rage" in the first tercet of "Do not go gentle into that good night" disturbingly resembles the derisive transformation of "girl" to "bird" to "gourd" in the third tercet of "Request to Leda." Thomas also often prominently featured and re-featured characteristic words in his poetry, some of them unusual, such as "fuse" and "dogdayed," some of them ordinary and elemental, such as "green" and "grave" and "womb" and "tomb." He mined his own poetry for ore with which to load the rifts. I detailed the correspondence of vocabulary between "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "Poem on His Birthday" above; "Elegy," similarly, seems to pick up on the word "blind" he had used in "Do not go gentle," as well as "night," "light," and others, repeating the familiar words many times throughout the poem: "I prayed in the crouching room, by his blind bed, / In the muted house, one minute before / Noon, and night, and light" (*Collected* 156).

Thomas's return to the villanelle form, then, might be seen as another instance of his practice of salvaging new poetry from old. Always a victim to the fear that he could



not accomplish anything new, perhaps he returned to something he knew for certain he had accomplished once before--even if only in jest. Caitlin Thomas's judgment of her husband's decline in output, expressed in a letter of February 1953, was as follows: "And since he has, as good as, given up writing, for the actor's ranting boom, and lispng mimicry, anything he sells is either a rehashed bubble and squeak of adolescence, or a never to be fulfilled promise in the future" (*Letters* 865). Caitlin partly blamed what amounted to Thomas's new career in poetry performance for his writing problems; whether or not that was the case, it may well be that Thomas's recent emphasis on reading poetry aloud was another factor in his choice of the villanelle form for "Do not go gentle into that good night." His recording of it for Caedmon Records remains famous.<sup>94</sup>

Thomas built another ordering principle besides the villanelle form into "Do not go gentle into that good night." The lyric is constructed on the classic model of rational argument: an initial proposition is supported by four equivalently weighted examples and then urged again in the conclusion. By an arbitrary grammatical accident, the imperative mood and the third-person plural present tense of regular verbs are the same; the first stanza of "Do not go gentle into that good night" is imperative, but the next four tercets are declarative, and yet the refrains do not alter. The concluding quatrain becomes imperative again, and yet the refrain does not alter. Every refrain is thus generically explicable according to the rules of argument and is at the same time syntactically appropriate, even apparently necessary. This highly logical structure of "Do not go gentle into that good night" doubles the air of order and mastery already present in the strict form. And Thomas, unlike Auden, does not attempt to loosen that strict form: the refrains do not vary, the meter is simple (if heavily-stressed) iambic pentameter, and the rhymes

are perfect and masculine. In the magisterial recording of "Do not go gentle into that good night," too, Thomas assumes an almost godly tone of stately authority that is hard to reconcile with reports of his showing up to a recording session with "bloated features, a cut eye, vomit on his clothes" (Davies 97).

Perhaps largely because of its exploitation of the grammatical accident that motivates and enables the refrains, "Do not go gentle into that good night" does not give the impression that order has been artificially imposed upon unruly disorder. In 1964, critic Harvey Gross admired the poem's technical naturalness: "I can think of no other villanelle in the language which seems so little contrived," he wrote (qtd. in Willis 226). Similarly, the lyric does not suggest that the fixed forms of civilized social behavior have been or should be imposed upon unruly emotion. The lyric instead makes rage in the face of imminent and inexorable death seem natural, reasonable, inevitable. (As, surely, it is.) In Thomas's line "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" there is even an echo of both the idea and the syntax of Empson's "It is the pain, it is the pain endures." The angry, painful order of the universe seems revealed, not imposed--and at the same time, the orderings of the villanelle come somehow to seem as natural, as given, as immortal as the fearful symmetry of tiger stripes.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

"Do not go gentle into that good night" only just made it into the 1952 edition of Thomas's *Collected Poems*: Thomas decided at the last moment that the villanelle should replace a poem titled "Paper and Sticks" (*Letters* 839).<sup>96</sup> The American edition of the *Collected Poems* came out in March of 1953, and Thomas died on November ninth of the

same year, in New York, from a combination of asthma, alcohol poisoning, and a medically-administered overdose of morphine (Davies 94). Some time in that same year of 1953, probably before Thomas's death, Theodore Roethke's "The Waking" was published in the anthology *New World Writing IV*. This eminent epigone with its memorable refrains ("I wake to sleep and take my waking slow / I learn by going where I have to go") has come to be as much or more admired than "Do not go gentle into that good night." There is little doubt that Roethke "picked up" the villanelle from his good friend Dylan Thomas, whether in person or from the appearance of "Do not go gentle into that good night" in the first edition of Thomas's *Collected Poems*. Roethke's bibliographer James Richard McLeod dates the manuscript of "The Waking" to June 25, 1952 (27).

A then-unknown college girl named Sylvia Plath also published a villanelle that year: her "Mad Girl's Love Song" was printed in the August 1953 issue of *Mademoiselle*. Plath published another villanelle two years later in the *New Orleans Poetry Journal* (see Appendix II). Plath would later recount in *The Bell Jar* that in a non-credit chemistry course at Smith she "sat back enjoying the bright lights and the colored fires and wrote page after page of villanelles and sonnets" (40). Plath, too, in the wake of the notoriety that Dylan Thomas's sudden death gave to his work, had speedily fallen under the spell of "Do not go gentle into that good night."

The major poets of the mid-century period could and would have revived and revised the virelai or the triolet, no doubt, had one or two of them happened to produce one or two interesting treatments of either form, thus casually initiating a friendly challenge round. The sestina underwent a similar (though differently timed) revival

starting with Ezra Pound's "Sestina Altaforte"; interestingly enough, Elizabeth Bishop read Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* in 1936 and wrote her first sestina ("Miracle for Breakfast") after noticing Empson's attention to Sidney's "Ye Goat-Herd Gods" (Fenton URL). There was nothing necessarily special about the villanelle, though of course its form did prove to be suggestive--but then all forms are suggestive. Philip K. Jason's 1980 article "Modern Versions of the Villanelle" concludes that "the longevity and flexibility of the villanelle suggests that its form is near the center of basic experiential patterns," but I prefer his less essentializing (and almost contradictory) assertion that some villanelles enable us to "glimpse the mood of a poetic era" (145). Jason's article is based on seven major examples: Passerat's "*J'ay perdu ma tourterelle*," Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night," Roethke's "The Waking," Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song," Levertov's "Obsessions" (1959), Merrill's "The World and the Child" (1962) and Tom Disch's "The Rapist's Villanelle" (1981). Jason's observation that "the villanelle is often used, and properly used, to deal with one or another degree of obsession" is true of these villanelles, but not of the nineteenth-century villanelles he omits from his discussion (145). I would argue that theme does not inhere in form, as the mid-century modernists proved by their complete erasure of the villanelle's previous "trifling" reputation.

After Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night," the villanelle was firmly proved respectable. But it was still by no means common among poets, nor did scholars of poetry take much interest in the history or significance of the form--beyond, of course, the continued existence of brief definitions in handbooks. In the 1973 edition of the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, for instance, only Empson's "Villanelle" is annotated with an explanation of the form, even though both Thomas's "Do not go gentle

into that good night" and Roethke's "The Waking" are also included. (Empson's "Missing Dates" also appears.) Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" sports only a biographical footnote mentioning that the poem "was written during the final illness of Thomas's father," while Roethke's "The Waking" appears without comment (726, 911, 758). Similarly, Paul Fussell's well-known discursive treatise *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, originally written in 1965 and revised and republished in 1979, contains no reference at all to the villanelle--evidence that those scattered twentieth-century examples by Empson, Auden, Thomas, Roethke, the young Plath, and (by the second edition) Bishop had not made an indelible impression on the history of poetic form in general. Fussell does mention the originally foreign sestina in his chapter titled "The English Stanzas," so the fact that the villanelle might not be considered an English form is not the reason for its omission.<sup>97</sup>

The common, contemporary, emphatically postmodern villanelle was surely ushered in by Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" of 1976. With a full knowledge of the history of the villanelle, especially at mid-twentieth-century, we can see that one of the reasons "One Art" has been so influential is that it specifically and irrevocably demolishes the implicit modernist analogy between technical mastery of poetic form and psychological mastery of self and world:

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant

to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

--Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster. (178)

Bishop's villanelle shares the rational argument structure of "Do not go gentle into that good night": the first tercet introduces a proposition, the next four supply illustrative examples, and the quatrain (in which a particular, individual addressee is revealed) restates and reasserts the original thesis. The important difference between "One Art" and "Do not go gentle into that good night," however, is that by the end of "One Art" the poet has lost her own argument along with everything else. The poem begins with a seemingly confident "grave truth" that already subtly undermines itself with the casual contraction "isn't," a construction that Thomas would never have allowed: "Don't go gentle into that good night" is unimaginable. The examples that the poet proffers in support of her argument are not equivalent to each other, as they are in "Do not go gentle into that good night"; instead they increase in affective significance until they threaten to overwhelm. Almost every technical feature of the poem is irregular except the bare bones of the villanelle structure: diction, meter, enjambment, rhyme, and even punctuation all heighten the sense that the poet's relationship to language is distinctly nervous.

Bishop's evocative "Verdigris" of 1950, though it did employ strong interstanzaic enjambments that were then new in the history of the villanelle, was technically and

tonally aligned to a much greater degree with the mid-century villanelles of Auden and

Thomas:

The catalogues will tell you that they mean  
the Chinese bronzes were like fresh-turned loam.  
The time to watch for is when time grows green.

Some like them green, some still prefer them clean,  
as found in strange museums away from home.  
The catalogues will tell you that they mean

it isn't any old phosphorescent sheen  
confines them to the past; in polychrome  
the time to watch for is when Time grows green.

The queer complexion of a former Queen,  
Justice an upright leaf upon her Dome,  
the catalogues will tell you that they mean

left in the earth, or out, it is foreseen  
we get like that; also if lost in foam.  
The time to watch for is when Time grows green.

Oh blue-green seas of Greece, and in between,  
the olive-groves and copper roofs of Rome!  
The catalogues will tell you that they mean  
the time to watch for is when Time grows green.

The refrains here assert a privileged truth that is not undermined by anything in the poem itself. And as in Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," the poet interprets the lessons of art for the reader and comes up with a somber, faintly pedantic reminder of human mortality ("we get like that"). Bishop's later "aviary villanelle," with its polysyllabic feminine rhymes, may well have represented an effort to ironize the magisterial tone and form exemplified by "Do not go gentle into that good night," but if so, Bishop judged the effort unsuccessful. Bishop's eventual accomplishment, with "One Art," was to call into serious question the possibility of imposing order on the disorder of human suffering. The

implicit truth behind "One Art" might as well be that the masters of modern poetry at mid-century were frequently wrong about suffering.



## CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" made the villanelle contemporary, postmodern, popular. Almost everyone nowadays seems to have written one or two villanelles (not usually more) just to see if they can, just to show that they can, just to see what happens. New Formalists cherish the link with an accessible art and with a pure abstraction. Multiculturalist poets use it as one of the master's tools that can be used to break into or take down the master's house--or to build a new one. Anxious students and perhaps still more anxious teachers find the "discipline" of a fixed form salutary: more learnable, more teachable, more gradable than the disturbing indefinables of free verse. Closeted populists may sing along with the radio in the private goldfish bowls of their cars, then sing more respectable refrains at a lower volume in the public cloister of poetry culture. Postmodern linguistic gamesters expose the arbitrariness of language and pattern, especially of the binary opposition that promises a final resolution in coupling. All these poets (unless all these characters inhabit a single poet) are writing other poems in other forms, but for the same reasons. Somehow all these disparate and struggling atoms bond to make contemporary poetry: hortatory, famished, professional, melodious, babbling, rasterized.

The danger of even this book-length project on the villanelle is that it might foster the impression that all poems are villanelles, which is demonstrably not the case. The villanelle--and other fixed forms such as the sestina, not even excluding the sonnet--retains its most contemporary character when we are a bit surprised to find it hanging around (again!), like the hounds in David Graham's "The Dogs in Dutch Paintings": "How shall I not love them, snoozing / right through the Annunciation? They inhabit / the

outskirts of every importance, sprawl / dead center in each oblivious household" (*Poetry Daily* 374). A single poet might go through a villanelle phase, and works like James Cummins's *The Whole Truth* (a book of *Perry Mason* sestinas) might have more than just novelty appeal, but on the whole the first endearment of contemporary poetry to its readers is its Babel variegation. The vanity publishers at Forward Press, who need not worry about producing a book people would want to read, have already issued several collections of villanelles and rondeaus. Such dull, sad drones should be left uncousined.

Still, the value of artificially isolating the villanelle for attention is that historical contiguities can be traced where otherwise we might see none. This is important. Fractious factionalism is at least as dreary as uniformity. Moreover, there is a fair degree of certainty about the influences revealed by poetic form, especially in the case of the early history of the villanelle, where we can trace the passing of the form from hand to hand, text to text, with fascinating precision: Ténint, Banville, Gosse, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the world. Poetic form enables poetic history. When Paul Fussell declares that the poppies of "In Flanders Fields" are descended from the poppy that *Patience's* Bunthorne might hold "in his medieval hand" while sashaying down Piccadilly, the possibility seems both likely and fertile. But there were, after all, also real poppies in Flanders fields. We know with more certainty that McCrae learned the rondeau not from nature or his own imagination, but from some book or some teacher. Sometimes we can find out from where, or from whom, and then what becomes important is human relationship, even if that relationship is mediated by text. Poetic form is always to some

degree about poetic community and confluence, which for some means a specter called "tradition."

And because what is important is human relationship and poetic community, we ought to remember that the villanelle is a mere golem. McFarland is particularly prone to semi-personification of the villanelle, and this leads him into the errors of supposing on the one hand that Theodore Roethke's "The Waking" is somehow derived from Mazzone Marc' Antonio's sixteenth-century "Con questa belta mano" and asserting on the other hand that "Despite the reiterative refrain lines, the villanelle had been proven, at least in the hands of able poets, capable of the profoundest themes"--as though such a capacity had lain dormant in the form for centuries and waited only for the able poets of the twentieth century to reveal it (96). The villanelle is an abstraction, like all sets of rules, and is therefore subject to virtually infinite interpretation. Even what constitutes "a villanelle" is subject to argument. When nineteenth-century poets and critics describe the form as on the one hand "naïve" and on the other hand "decadent," we can easily see that this is projection, and what is at stake has nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of the form. When twentieth-century poets and critics describe the form as "obsessive" or "arbitrary" or "difficult," or "inevitable," however, we may commit the fallacy of thinking that our own judgments are more accurate and final than those of our foolish predecessors.

That the Emperor has no clothes and the fixed-form villanelle has no history prior to the nineteenth century is a thrilling scandal (or at the very least a mildly interesting footnote to literary history), but it makes me more worried and querulous than I would

like to be about the state of poetry scholarship. Even that phrase, "the state of poetry scholarship," sounds reactionary. But without becoming too irritable about swallows and summers, I can observe with neutral interest that the history of the villanelle shows, if anything, how little history matters to poetry. It matters only insofar as it is useful. The poets and scholars of any age are always embroiled in their own thoroughly contemporary professional and aesthetic tussles, and it is this context that produces new poetry. In all honesty, if there is a zero-sum choice to be made, I would rather have good new poems than perfectly accurate scholarship, and contemporary poets may be attracted to the form because it connotes tradition without bearing the burden of tradition. Many poets who have written villanelles that I love, however, have averred that they are using form ironically, slyly, writing against tradition rather than with tradition, revising the forms. The rather short tradition behind the villanelle shows above all, I think, how hollow are our pretensions to rebellion and nonconformity and revision and transformation; it shows that we are often in fact the very authorities and institutions and rule-makers we profess to oppose. I think it may be best to admit this openly.

I think that the modern notion of technical mastery has evolved with the consolidation of the institutional authority of creative writing programs into the notion of technical credentialization. Contemporary poets often write villanelles as an exercise; contemporary teachers of poetry often set villanelles as an exercise. One additional (ahistorical) point I would like to make is that the villanelle is not so difficult to write as it is commonly reputed to be. The "Frenchness" of the villanelle signified its association with decadent sexuality for the Victorians, but for us I think it signifies a vague and

monolithic European tradition. The term "French forms" is as inaccurate and as politicized as any categorical term; the insistence with which Anglophone poetry handbooks still refer to the forms as "French" seems to indicate a reluctance to assume responsibility for them. Francis Barton Gummere's *A Handbook of Poetics, For Students of English Verse*, first published in 1885 and often reprinted thereafter, commented "Of late, considerable effort has been put forth to introduce into our English verse-system the forms known to French poetry. [...] So far, these forms are not naturalised as English measures, but they are practised to a considerable extent" (141). More than a hundred years later, the villanelle has not even yet been granted more than a temporary visa into the country of Anglophone poetry; handbooks such as Adams's *Poetic Designs* and still place it under the "French Forms" heading. This categorical term is probably both irreversible and harmless, but it is interesting that the villanelle and the sestina, both of which have been enthusiastically adopted by contemporary poets writing in English, are still treated as aliens to the English language.

The "French form" categorization might now have less to do with shoring up the fragments of national identities than it does with shoring up the *différance* of language identities; the unconscious imperialism of the nineteenth century has probably been mostly eradicated, but there remains some trace of linguistic othering. Commentators repeatedly justify the assertion that the villanelle is foreign to English by citing the fact that there are fewer rhyme sounds in English than in French, which supposedly makes it more difficult for a poet writing in English to find the number of rhyming words necessary for the composition of a nineteen-line villanelle. That there are only a handful

of villanelles in French while there are now sackfuls of villanelles in English, then, must mean that Anglophone poets have a better work ethic than Francophone poets, or that there are enough rhymes in English to go around, or that difficulty is no deterrent to poetic composition. Some combination of all three seems to me to be the case: a Type A anxiety about poetic knowledge and skill seems to characterize professionalized American poetry in particular, and I would argue that the comparative poverty of rhyme options in English is neither acute nor daunting.

It is difficult to count words (what constitutes a word?), but most estimates suggest that there are at least four times as many words in English as there are in French: *The Story of English* reports that "The compendious *Oxford English Dictionary* lists about 500,000 words; and a further half-million technical and scientific terms remain uncatalogued. According to traditional estimates, neighboring German has a vocabulary of about 185,000 and French fewer than 100,000, including such Franglais as *le snack-barre* and *le hit-parade*" (10). This means that there are far more *sets* of rhyme sounds to choose from in English, even if those sets contain fewer rhymes. One English rhyming dictionary lists about 55,000 rhyme-sets, while one French rhyming dictionary lists only about 50,000 *words* in the entire volume.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, rhyme-sets in English, though they contain fewer elements than rhymesets in French, commonly contain more than seven rhymes, the highest number of rhymes needed for a conventional nineteen-line villanelle. To exemplify: the sound "-elle" that anchors the refrain in Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" has about seven hundred rhymes in French, while the sound "-ight" that anchors the refrain in Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" has about three

hundred rhymes in English.<sup>99</sup> And these are only the perfect rhymes; the use of slant rhyme, of course, offers thousands more possibilities to Anglophone poets.

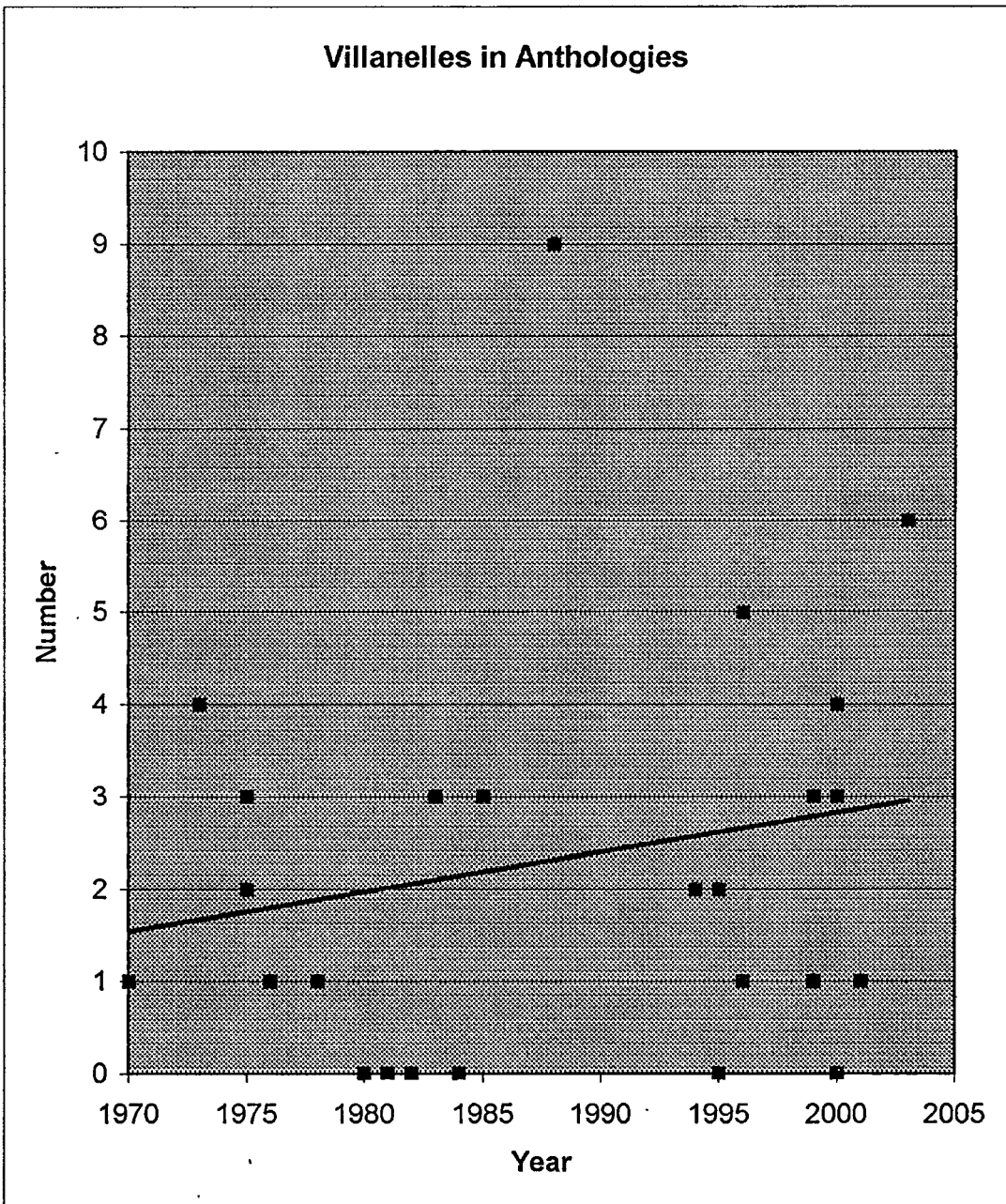
What distinguishes formal poetry from free verse is not anything to do with ease or difficulty of composition; it is everything to do with ease or difficulty of judgment. It is far easier to distinguish a good villanelle from a bad one than it is to distinguish a good free verse poem from a bad one, because the standards are clearer. Even these shift: in earlier periods a villanelle was judged good if it did not vary the refrains; creative and complex variation is now admired. Formal poetry that used slant rhyme was judged inferior before, now it doesn't matter. But the difference is the existence of objective criteria, a field against which to measure. In this sense it is surely easier to write a good villanelle than a good poem in free verse, because when the poet becomes the critic of her own work, as she inevitably does, she can better see the discrepancies and labor to correct them.

Julie Kane writes, "The fact is that a hundred-fifty-year-old fixed-form villanelle tradition *does* now exist, although erected on a false foundation: situations perceived as real are real in their consequences" (269). Poets who have written villanelles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have inadvertently constructed, not altered or demolished, a tradition. The sixteenth-century French villanelle is not there to be altered (save for a single instance by Passerat, and that instance is relatively unknown); and the work of the no doubt contemptible late-Victorian dilettante poets was never an important influence, even negatively, for contemporary poets. It seems clear that contemporary poets have, in the case of the villanelle, been more receptive than rebellious, however

pallid an attitude that may seem. That the villanelle is flourishing now does not indicate that contemporary poets have recovered a naïve and graceful form from a naïve and graceful time, nor does it indicate that they have radically deconstructed an oppressive poetic tradition: it indicates that contemporary poets have been companionably influenced by the poetry and poetic practice of their peers, as always.



## APPENDIX I: Anthologies Examined



On this chart, the villanelles in the anthologies I examined (listed below) are plotted by number and year. Blue squares are data points, and the red line shows an increasing average since 1970.

Anthology	Number	Titles of Villanelles
Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, ed., <i>The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1918</i> , New edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940).	0	None.
Arthur M. Eastman, ed., <i>The Norton Anthology of Poetry</i> , 1st edn. (New York: Norton, 1970).	1	Roethke, "The Waking"
Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, eds., <i>The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry</i> , 1st edn. (New York: Norton, 1973).	4	Empson, "Villanelle" and "Missing Dates"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; Roethke, "The Waking"
Alexander W. Allison and Arthur M. Eastman, eds., <i>The Norton Anthology of Poetry</i> , Rev. edn. (New York: Norton, 1975).	2	Empson, "Missing Dates"; Roethke, "The Waking"
Helen Louise Gardner, ed., <i>The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1950</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).	3	Wilde, "Theocritus"; Empson, "Missing Dates"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"
Richard Ellmann, ed., <i>The New Oxford Book of American Verse</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).	1	Roethke, "The Waking"
John Hayward, ed., <i>The Penguin Book of English Verse</i> (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978).	1	Empson, "Missing Dates"
D. J. Enright, ed., <i>The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse, 1945-1980</i> (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).	0	None.

Anthology	Number	Titles of Villanelles
Martin Booth, ed., <i>Contemporary British and North American Verse: An Introductory Anthology</i> (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).	0	None.
Donald Merriam Allen and George F. Butterick, eds., <i>The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised</i> , 1st Evergreen edn. (New York: Grove Press, 1982).	0	None.
Alexander W. Allison, ed., <i>The Norton Anthology of Poetry</i> , 3rd edn. (New York: Norton, 1983).	3	Empson, "Missing Dates"; Roethke, "The Waking"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"
Robert Penn Warren and Academy of American Poets., eds., <i>Fifty Years of American Poetry: Anniversary Volume for the Academy of American Poets</i> (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1984).	0	None.
A. Poulin, Jr., ed., <i>Contemporary American Poetry</i> , 4th edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).	3	Roethke, "The Waking"; Bishop, "One Art"; Justice, "In Memory of the Unknown Poet Robert Boardman Vaughn"
Robert Pack, Sydney Lea, Jay Parini, and Bread Loaf Writers' Conference of Middlebury College., eds., <i>The Bread Loaf Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry</i> (Hanover: Published for the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference Middlebury College by University Press of New England, 1985).	3	Justice, "Villanelle at Sundown"; Morgan, "The Christmas Tree"; Simmerman, "Hide-and-Go-Seek" [?]

Anthology	Number	Titles of Villanelles
Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, eds., <i>The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry</i> , 2nd edn. (New York: Norton, 1988).	9	Empson, "Villanelle" and "Missing Dates"; Auden, Miranda; Roethke, "The Waking"; Bishop, "One Art"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; Hugo, "The Freaks at Spurgin Road Field"; Justice, In Memory of the Unknown Poet Robert Boardman Vaughn; Dove, "Parsley"
A. Poulin, Jr., <i>Contemporary American Poetry</i> , 5th edn. (Boston and Toronto: Houghton Mifflin, 1991).	2	Roethke, "The Waking"; Bishop, "One Art"
Paul Hoover, ed., <i>Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology</i> (New York: Norton, 1994).	2	Lehman, "First Offense"; Yau, "Chinese Villanelle"
Jay Parini, ed., <i>The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry</i> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).	0	None.
Carl Woodring and James S. Shapiro, eds., <i>The Columbia Anthology of British Poetry</i> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).	2	Davidson, "The Battle"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"
Margaret W. Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, eds., <i>The Norton Anthology of Poetry</i> , 4th edn. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).	5	Empson, "Missing Dates"; Roethke, "The Waking"; Bishop, "One Art"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; Dove, "Parsley"
A. Poulin, Jr., ed., <i>Contemporary American Poetry</i> , 6th edn. (Boston, Toronto: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).	5	Bishop, "One Art"; Roethke, "The Waking"; Strand, "2. The Disquieting Muses" (from "Two De Chiricos"); Williams, "Villanelle of the Suicide's Mother"; Matthews, "Practice, Practice, Practice"

Anthology	Number	Titles of Villanelles
Robert Penn Warren and Academy of American Poets., eds., <i>Sixty Years of American Poetry: Celebrating the Anniversary of the Academy of American Poets</i> , Expanded edn. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996).	1	Carolyn Kizer, "On a Line from Valéry"
Michael Collier, Stanley Plumly, and Bread Loaf Writers' Conference of Middlebury College., eds., <i>The New Bread Loaf Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry</i> (Hanover, NH; London: Published for Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and Middlebury College Press by University Press of New England, 1999).	3	Linda Bierds, "Grand Forks, 1997"; Edward Hirsch, "Ocean of Grass"; Gregory Orr, "The Talk"
Christopher B. Ricks, ed., <i>The Oxford Book of English Verse</i> (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).	1	Empson, "Missing Dates"
Michael Collier and Bread Loaf Writers' Conference of Middlebury College, eds., <i>The New American Poets: A Bread Loaf Anthology</i> (Hanover, NH; London: University Press of New England, 2000).	0	None.
Paul Keegan, ed., <i>The New Penguin Book of English Verse</i> (London: Allen Lane, 2000).	4	Empson, "Missing Dates"; Auden, "Miranda"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; Mahon, "Antarctica"
Cary Nelson, ed., <i>Anthology of Modern American Poetry</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).	3	Robinson, "The House on the Hill"; Bishop, "One Art"; Dove, "Parsley"

Anthology	Number	Titles of Villanelles
Keith Tuma, ed., <i>Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).	1	Empson, "Villanelle"
Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair, eds., <i>The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry</i> , 3rd edn. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).	6	Empson, "Villanelle" and "Missing Dates"; Roethke, "The Waking"; Bishop, "One Art"; Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; Dove, "Parsley"

## APPENDIX II: List of Villanelles

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## APPENDIX III: Historical Collation of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle"

This appendix gives a historical collation of full and partial quotations of Jean Passerat's "Villanelle" ("J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle") in twenty-eight anthologies, handbooks, and other works. There are a great many textual variants among these "editions" of the poem, both substantive and accidental; some result from divergent practices of modernizing spelling and punctuation, some from the faulty French of English speakers, and some from other causes. I discuss some of the more interesting variants and variant trends in Chapter One.

I have taken as base text the printed text of Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" that appeared in the *Recueil des oeuvres poétiques de Jan Passerat augmenté de plus de la moitié, outre les précédentes impressions* (Paris: Morel, 1606). This work, which was published four years after Passerat's death, contained the first public appearance of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle," unless (as is likely) the sequence to which it belongs was circulated in manuscript—but there is no manuscript extant. My base text is taken from a microfilm of a copy of the *Recueil* located in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (see Figure 1 for an image of the page); I have also examined a copy of the work at the Clark Art Institute, which shows no variants. There are also copies of the *Recueil* in the United States at Harvard and at Princeton.

The reading from the base text (the lemma) appears to the left of the bracket, and readings from subsequent works appear to the right of the bracket. My editorial comments are enclosed in brackets and italicized. Sigla representing the twenty-eight

books examined are given below; they consist of the work's first year of publication followed by the first letter of the author's last name. When a work has gone through later editions, I have noted it in the table of works below. For all works except Richelet's *Dictionnaire de rimes* (1810R) and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911G) I have been able to examine one copy of all such later editions: in every case the text of Passerat's poem was identical to that in the first edition of the work (e.g., the text in the 1957 *Oxford Book of French Verse* is the same as that in the 1907 *Oxford Book of French Verse*). Quicherat's *Traité de versification française* (1850Q) and Strand and Boland's *The Making of a Poem* (2000S) do not quote the poem in full—both quote only the first six lines—but I have included these works in the collation for two reasons: they are the only works I have found that quote part rather than all of the poem, and the variants in both are substantive.

For changes that occur in twenty-one or more works, I have used the phrase *all works except* [sigla], and I also summarize these changes here. There has been only one scholarly edition of the French poetry of Passerat, and it is more than a century old: Prosper Blanchemain's *Les poésies françaises de Jean Passerat* (1880B). This work almost exactly reproduces the version of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" in the 1606 *Recueil*, even retaining the base text's italic type: the sole alteration is "β" to "ff" (lines 5 and 8). The twenty-six remaining works uniformly agree on the change Amour] amour (line 7). Twenty-five works modernize "i" to "j"; "f" to "s"; "u" to "v"; and "ß" to "ss": Boulmier's *Villanelles* (1878B) retains the "i" for "j" and the "u" for "v." The type of the base text is

italic; while most texts agree in using roman type instead, Dobson's *A Note on Some Foreign Forms of Verse* (1878D) does print the poem entirely in italic type. Four works print one or both refrains (lines 1, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, and 19) in italic type, however, and this is noted below in the line where it occurs. The case change Tourterelle] tourterelle (lines 1, 6, 12, and 18) occurs in twenty-six works: Blanchemain's edition (1880B) and *The Harrap Anthology of French Poetry* (1958C) retain the capital for this word. The change Helas] Hélas (line 5) occurs in twenty-five works: Blanchemain's edition (1880B), Gramont's *Les vers français et leur prosodie* (1876G), and Strand and Boland's *The Making of a Poem* (2000S) print the unaccented "e." The change après] après (lines 3, 9, 15, and 19) also occurs in twenty-five works: Blanchemain's edition (1880B), Boulmier's *Villanelles* (1878B), and *The Harrap Anthology of French Poetry* (1958C) retain the original spelling. The change veus] veux (lines 3, 9, 15, and 19) occurs in twenty-four works: the original spelling is retained in Blanchemain's edition (1880B), Boulmier's *Villanelles* (1878B), *The Harrap Anthology of French Poetry*, (1958C), and Elwert's *Traité de versification française des origines à nos jours* (1965E).

Global changes to type and lineation and appear at the beginning of the collation, and all other changes are keyed to line numbers. All words from the base text are always given with their base text punctuation, if any. I have treated accidental variants as though they are equivalent to character or substantive variants, a practice that was desirable because a word's spelling and its punctuation have frequently varied separately. All variants are listed chronologically by their first appearance.

### *Transcription of Base Text*

*I'ay perdu ma Tourterelle:*  
*Eft-ce point celle que i'oy?*  
*Je veus aller après elle.*  
*Tu regretes ta femelle,*  
*Helas! außi fai-ie moy,*  
*I'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.*  
*Si ton Amour eft fidelle,*  
*Außi est ferme ma foy,*  
*Je veus aller après elle.*  
*Ta plainte fe renouuelle;*  
*Toufiours plaindre ie me doy:*  
*I'ay perdu ma Tourterelle.*  
*En ne voyant plus la belle*  
*Plus rien de beau ie ne voy:*  
*Je veus aller après elle.*  
*Mort, que tant de fois i'appelle,*  
*Pren ce qui fe donne à toy:*  
*I'ay perdu ma Tourterelle,*  
*Je veus aller après elle.*

### *Table of Sigla and Works Collated*

<b>Siglum</b>	<b>Work</b>
1810R	Pierre Richelet et al. <i>Dictionnaire de rimes</i> . Nouv. édn. (Lyon: A. Leroy, 1810. Editions or printings with full text of Passerat's poem reportedly include those of 1751, 1760, 1762, 1778, 1781, 1799, 1810, 1817, and 1973; previous editions or printings of the work without any text of Passerat's poem had appeared in 1692, 1702, 1721, and 1739).
1844T	Wilhelm Ténint. <i>Prosodie de l'école moderne</i> . Paris: Didier, 1844. New edn. under the title <i>Wilhelm Ténint et sa Prosodie de l'école moderne: avec des documents inédits</i> . Patricia Siegel, ed. Paris; Genève: Champion-Slatkine, 1986.
1850Q	Louis Marie Quicherat, <i>Traité de versification française où sont exposées les variations de l'accent tonique dans les vers français</i> , 2me édn. (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1850).

- | <b>Siglum</b> | <b>Work</b>  |
|---------------|--|
| 1876G         | Ferdinand (comte) de Gramont. <i>Les vers français et leur prosodie. Lois régissant la poésie en France, leur variations, exemples pris des diverses époques, formes de poèmes anciennes et modernes</i> (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1876).                                       |
| 1877G         | Edmund Gosse, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse," <i>Cornhill Magazine</i> 36 (1877): 53-72.   |
| 1878B         | Joseph Boulmier, <i>Villanelles, suivies de poésies en langage du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, et précédées d'une notice historique et critique sur la villanelle avec une villanelle technique</i> (Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1878).   |
| 1878D         | Austin Dobson, "A Note on Some Foreign Forms of Verse," <i>Latter-Day Lyrics</i> , ed. W. Davenport Adams (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878) 333-49.  |
| 1879B         | Louis Aimé Victor Becq de Fouquières, <i>Oeuvres choisies des poètes français du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, contemporains de Ronsard</i> (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1879).   |
| 1880B         | Prosper Blanchemain, ed., <i>Les poésies françaises de Jean Passerat</i> (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1880).  |
| 1887S         | George Saintsbury, ed., <i>French Lyrics</i> (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887).  |
| 1903A         | Raymond Macdonald Alden, <i>English Verse: Specimens Illustrating Its Principles and History</i> , English Readings (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1903; reprinted 1937).   |
| 1903K         | Leon Emile Kastner, <i>A History of French Versification</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903).  |
| 1904T         | Arthur Augustus Tilley, <i>The Literature of the French Renaissance</i> , 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1904).   |
| 1906W         | George Wyndham, <i>Ronsard and La Pléiade, with Selections from Their Poetry and Some Translations in the Original Metres</i> (London and NY: Macmillan, 1906).  |
| 1907L         | St. John Lucas, <i>The Oxford Book of French Verse XIIth Century-XIXth Century</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1907; reprinted 1924, 1957).  |
| 1911G         | Edmund Gosse, "Villanelle," <i>The Encyclopædia Britannica; A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information</i> , ed. Hugh Chisholm, Handy Volume Issue, 11th ed., vol. 28 (Cambridge, England and New York: At the University Press, 1910-11): 73-4. |



**Siglum Work**

- 1913Q P. M. Quitard, *Anthologie de l'amour, extraite des poètes français depuis le XV<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'au XIX<sup>e</sup>, avec des notices biographiques et littéraires* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1913).
- 1922C Helen Louise Cohen, *Lyric Forms from France: Their History and Their Use* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922).
- 1923S Egerton Smith, *The Principles of English Metre* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1923).
- 1935P Warner Forrest Patterson, *Three Centuries of French Poetic Theory: A Critical History of the Chief Arts of Poetry in France (1328-1630)* University of Michigan Publications Language and Literature 15 III-IV (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1935).
- 1948C Huntington Cairns, ed., *The Limits of Art* (Washington DC: Pantheon, 1948).
- 1956A Marcel Arland, ed., *Anthologie de la poésie française* (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1956).
- 1958B Geoffrey Brereton, ed., *The Penguin Book of French Verse*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958; vol. 2 1964, 1967; rev. edn. in 4 vols. 1975, 1977).
- 1958C Joseph Chiari, ed., *The Harrap Anthology of French Poetry* (London: Harrap, 1958).
- 1962M Philippe Martinon, et al. *Dictionnaire des rimes françaises, précédé d'un traité de versification* (Paris: Larousse, 1962).
- 1965A Maurice Allem, *Anthologie poétique française: XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Texte integral 45, vol. 2 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965).
- 1965E W. Theodor Elwert, *Traité de versification française des origines à nos jours*, Manuels et études linguistiques 8 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1965).
- 2000S Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

*Collation*

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
		[roman type]	[all works except 1878D, 1880B, and lines listed below in 1903K, 1923S, 1965E, 2000S]
		[white space added between stanzas]	[all works except 1879B, 1880B, 1903K, 1904T, 1906W, 2000S]
		[no first line indent; stanzas justified left]	1844T, 1850Q, 1876G, 1877G, 1878B, 1878D, 1903A, 1903K, 1907L, 1911G, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1956A, 1958B, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E, 2000S
1		[italic type]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E, 2000S
	I'ay]	J'ai	1810R, 1844T, 1850Q, 1878D, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1965A, 2000S
		J'ay	1876G, 1877G, 1879B, 1903A, 1903K, 1904T, 1923S, 1956A, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E
	ma]	my	2000S
	Tourterelle:]	tourterelle,	1810R, 1876G, 1913Q
		tourterelle.	1844T, 1877G, 1878D, 1903A, 1962M
		tourterelle:	1850Q, 1878B, 1879B, 1903K, 1911G, 1923S, 1956A, 1958B, 1965A, 1965E, 2000S
		tourterelle;	1887S, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C
2	Est-ce point]	N'est-ce point	1844T
		N'est-ce-point	1878D
		Est-ce-point	1903A
	celle]	elle	1844T, 1850Q, 1876G, 1878D, 1903A, 1913Q, 1923S, 1962M
		d'elle	1965E
	i'oy?]	j'oi?	1810R, 1844T, 1911G, 1965A

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
		j'oy?	1850Q, 1876G, 1877G, 1879B, 1887S, 1903A, 1903K, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1956A, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E, 2000S
		j'oi (j'entends),	1878D
		j'ois?	1958B
3		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	veus]	veux	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C, 1965E]
	après]	après	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C]
4	Tu]	--Tu	1850Q
	regretes]	regrettes	1810R, 1844T, 1876G, 1878B, 1878D, 1911G, 1950Q, 1887S, 1903A, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1962M, 1965A, 1965E
		regrette	1877G
		regretes	1879B, 1903K, 1904T, 1956A
	femelle,]	femelle.	1844T, 1850Q, 1958B
		femelle?	1878B, 1911G, 1965E, 2000S
		femelle:	1878D
		femelle;	1876G, 1903A
		femelle!	1962M
5	Helas!]	Hélas!	[ <i>all works except</i> 1876G, 1880B, 2000S]
	außi]	aussi	[ <i>all works except</i> 1844T, 1880B, 1903A, 1913Q, 1962M]
		ainsi	1844T, 1913Q
		auffi	1880B
		aussy	1876G, 1903A, 1923S, 1962M
	fai-ie]	fais-je	1810R, 1850Q, 1877G, 1887S, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1948C, 1965A, 2000S
		fais-je,	1844T, 1878D, 1935P, 1958B
		fay-ie,	1878B
		fai-je	1879B, 1903K, 1904T, 1906W, 1958C

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
		fay-je	1876G, 1903A, 1923S, 1962M
		fay-je,	1965E
	moy,	moi,	1810R, 1887S, 1906W
		moi.	1844T, 1958B
		moy:	1876G, 1878B, 1879B, 1903A, 1923S, 1903K, 1913Q, 1956A, 1962M, 1965E, 2000S
		moy.	1904T, 1907L, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C
		moi:	1911G, 1850Q, 1878D, 1965A
6		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E, 2000S
	J'ay]	J'ai	1810R, 1844T, 1850Q, 1878D, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1965A, 2000S
		J'ay	1876G, 1877G, 1879B, 1903A, 1903K, 1904T, 1923S, 1956A, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E
	Tourterelle.]	tourterelle.	[ <i>all works except</i> 1880B, 1958C]
7			[ <i>lines 7-19 omitted</i> 1850Q, 2000S]
	Amour]	amour	[ <i>all works except</i> 1880B]
	fidelle,]	fidèle,	1844T, 1876G, 1903A, 1911G, 1913Q, 1958B, 1962M, 1965A
		fidèle	1878D
		fidelle	1923S
8	Außi]	Aussi	[ <i>all works except</i> 1880B, 1903A, 1962M)
		Auffi	1880B
		Aussy	1876G, 1903A, 1962M
	ferme]	fermi	1877G
	foy,]	foi:	1810R, 1878D, 1911G
		foi.	1844T
		joy;	1877G
		foy;	1878B, 1887S, 1903A, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C, 1965E
		foy:	1876G, 1913Q, 1962M
		foi;	1958B

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
		foy.	1958C
		foi,	1965A
9		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	veus]	veux	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C, 1965E]
	après]	après	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C]
10	plainte]	plaincte	1956A
	renouvelle;]	renouvelle:	1810R, 1877G, 1878D
		renouvelle.	1844T
		renouvelle,	1876G, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1962M
		renouvelle?	1878B
		renouvelle;	1879B, 1903K, 1904T, 1913Q, 1923S, 1956A, 1958C, 1965A
		renouvelle?	1903A, 1911G, 1965E
11	Toufiours]	Toujours	1810R, 1844T, 1876G, 1877G, 1878D, 1887S, 1903A, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1962M, 1965A
		Tousiours	1878B
		Tousjours	1879B, 1903K, 1904T, 1923S, 1956A, 1958C, 1965E
	doy:]	doi:	1810R, 1878D, 1965A
		doi.	1844T
		doy;	1887S, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1922C, 1935P, 1948C
		dois:	1911G
		dois;	1958B
12		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	J'ay]	J'ai	1810R, 1844T, 1878D, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1958B, 1965A
		J'ay	1877G, 1879B, 1903A, 1903K, 1904T, 1956A, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
	Tourterelle.]	tourterelle.	[ <i>all works except</i> 1880B, 1958C]
13	En]	Et	1903K
	la]	ma	1844T, 1878D
	belle]	belle,	1810R, 1844T, 1879B, 1887S, 1903K, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1956A, 1958B, 1962M, 1965A
14	voy:]	voi:	1810R
		voi.	1844T
		voi;	1878D, 1965A
		voy;	1879B, 1887S, 1903K, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1935P, 1948C, 1956A
		vois:	1911G
		vois;	1958B
15		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	veus]	veux	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C, 1965E]
	après]	après	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C]
16			[ <i>lines 16-19 omitted</i> 1935P]
	Mort,]	Mort	1810R, 1844T, 1876G, 1913Q, 1956A
	i'appelle,]	j'appelle	1810R, 1877G
		j'appelle,	[ <i>all works except</i> 1810R, 1877G, 1878B, 1880B]
17	Pren ce]	Prend ce	1810R, 1887S, 1962M
		Prends ce	1844T, 1878D, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1923S, 1948C, 1958B, 1965A
		Prens ce	1876G
		Pren-ce	1877G
	toy:]	toi:	1810R, 1911G
		toi.	1844T, 1878D, 1965A
		toy!	1877G, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1948C
		toi!	1958B

Line	Base Text	Variant	Works
18		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	l'ay]	J'ai	1810R, 1844T, 1876G, 1878D, 1887S, 1906W, 1907L, 1911G, 1913Q, 1922C, 1948C, 1958B, 1965A
		J'ay	1877G, 1879B, 1903A, 1903K, 1904T, 1923S, 1956A, 1958C, 1962M, 1965E
	Tourterelle,]	tourterelle,	1810R, 1850Q, 1876G, 1878B, 1879B, 1903K, 1907L, 1911G, 1956A, 1965A, 1965E, 2000S
		tourterelle.	1844T, 1878D, 1903A
		tourterelle;	1877G, 1887S, 1904T, 1906W, 1907L, 1913Q, 1922C, 1948C, 1958B
19		[ <i>extra white space before last line</i> ]	1844T
		[ <i>italic type</i> ]	1903K, 1923S, 1965E
	veus]	veux	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C, 1965E]
	après]	après	[ <i>all works except</i> 1878B, 1880B, 1958C]

## APPENDIX IV: Comparisons

J'ay perdu ma tourterelle.  
Est-ce point celle que j'oy?  
Je veux aller après elle.

Tu regrette ta femelle,  
Hélas! aussi fais-je moy,  
J'ay perdu ma tourterelle.

Si ton amour est fidelle,  
Aussi est fermi ma joy,  
Je veux aller après elle.

Ta plainte se renouvelle:  
Toujours plaindre je me doy:  
J'ay perdu ma tourterelle.

En ne voyant plus la belle  
Plus rien de beau je ne voy:  
Je veux aller après elle.

Mort, que tant de fois j'appelle  
Pren-ce qui se donne à toy!  
J'ay perdu ma tourterelle;  
Je veux aller après elle.

(Gosse, 1877, 64-5)

"J'ai perdu ma tourterelle:  
Est-ce point celle que j'oi?  
Je veux aller après elle.

Tu regrettes ta femelle?  
Hélas! aussi fais-je moi:  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.

Si ton amour est fidèle,  
Aussi est ferme ma foy;  
Je veux aller après elle.

Ta plainte se renouvelle?  
Toujours plaindre je me dois:  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle.

En ne voyant plus la belle  
Plus rien de beau je ne vois:  
Je veux aller après elle.

Mort, que tant de fois j'appelle  
Prends ce qui se donne à toi:  
J'ai perdu ma tourterelle,  
Je veux aller après elle."

(Gosse, 1911, 73-4)

I'ay perdu ma tourterelle:  
Est-ce point celle que i'oy?  
Ie veus aller après elle.

Tu regrettes ta femelle?  
Hélas! aussi fay-ie, moy:  
I'ay perdu ma tourterelle.

Si ton amour est fidelle,  
Aussi est ferme ma foy;  
Ie veus aller après elle.

Ta plainte se renouvelle?  
Tousiours plaindre ie me doy:  
I'ay perdu ma tourterelle.

En ne voyant plus la belle  
Plus rien de beau ie ne voy:  
Ie veus aller après elle.

Mort, que tant de fois i'appelle,  
Iren ce qui se donne à toy:  
I'ay perdu ma tourterelle,  
Ie veus aller après elle.

(Boulmier, 1878, 7-8)



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<sup>1</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, *Provinces*, translated by Milosz and Robert Hass (NY: The Ecco Press, 1991), 15. I have silently corrected the obvious misprint "chose" to "choose."

<sup>2</sup> For early debates on New Formalism in the journals, see especially Mary Kinzie, "The Rhapsodic Fallacy," *Salmagundi* 65 (1984): 63-79 and responses in the same volume; Ariel Dawson, "The Yuppie Poet," *AWP Newsletter* (May 1985): 36-43; Alan Shapiro, "The New Formalism," *Critical Inquiry* 14.1 (1987): 200-13; and David Wojahn, "'Yes, But ...': Some Thoughts on the New Formalism," *Crazyhorse* 32 (1987): 64-81. For collections of criticism on New Formalism, see Frederick Feirstein, *Expansive Poetry: Essays on the New Narrative & the New Formalism* (Santa Cruz, CA: Story Line Press, 1989); R. S. Gwynn, *New Expansive Poetry: Theory, Criticism, History*, Rev. ed. (Ashland, OR: Story Line Press, 1999); and Annie Finch, *After New Formalism: Poets on Form, Narrative, and Tradition* (Ashland, OR: Story Line Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix I for a table showing the anthologies I have examined and the villanelles they include.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix II for a list of villanelles published since 1845.

<sup>5</sup> And, sadly, there is at least one press of decidedly questionable reputation for which the villanelle seems to be an absolute gold mine. Subsidiaries of The Forward Press, of Peterborough, England—a modern vanity press—have published no fewer than three collections containing *only* villanelles: Andrew Head, ed., *Villanelle Vogue* (Peterborough: Poetry Now, 1998); Heather Killingray, ed., *The Ultimate Villanelle Collection* (Peterborough: Poetry Now, 1998); and Kelly Deacon, ed., *The Classic Collection of Villanelle* (Peterborough: Anchor, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Bishop is the editor of *Women's Poetry in France, 1965-1995: A Bilingual Anthology* (Amsterdam and NY: Rodopi, 1997)—a work that contains many marvelous texts and translations of French poems, and no villanelles. He is also co-editor, with Christopher Elson, of *Contemporary French Poetics*



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(Amsterdam and NY: Rodopi, 2002), and the author or editor of numerous other scholarly works on contemporary French poetry.

<sup>7</sup> In the interest of full disclosure, I include this piece, hitherto unpublished:

The Intact

Whatever has been touched remains itself,  
The brush of fingers causing just a shudder.  
Mere contact never altered something else.

The blood is blood, in blushes or in welts;  
The breath, the breath, although the breather smothers;  
Whatever has been crushed remains itself.

An unborn child can kick as though its flesh  
Were free as ours, confined within its mother:  
Mere bondage never stilled a someone else.

No matter what two bodies thought was felt  
When part of one was tucked inside the other,  
Whatever has been fucked remains itself.

A few new canyons have been carved upon my self  
By you. That's all. All landscapes shaped by lovers  
Merely shift: *here* is never somewhere else.

There you sit. I may touch you--kill some cells,  
Cause cataclysms--but we'll both recover.  
Whatever has been touched remains itself:  
Mere contact never altered something else.

<sup>8</sup> An article distilled from this dissertation appeared as "The Myth of the Fixed-Form Villanelle" *Modern Language Quarterly* 64.4 (2003): 427-43. Dr. Kane and I corresponded by e-mail just before the publication of this piece. Throughout this work, I refer chiefly to Dr. Kane's dissertation rather than to the published article, since the dissertation is broader in scope.

<sup>9</sup> I do not know whether McFarland intended this round hundred of villanelles.

<sup>10</sup> *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (NY: Portland House; Distributed by Outlet Book Co., 1989).

<sup>11</sup> All translations are mine except where indicated in the text.

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter One for a full discussion of the tangled issues regarding the definition of the villanelle in the 1751 *Dictionnaire de rimes*. Essentially, I differ slightly from Kane in thinking that this work does not "fix" the villanelle's form, and therefore I date the origin of the fixed-form villanelle to Wilhelm Ténint's 1844 *Prosodie de l'école moderne*—especially since, as Kane herself observes, it was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that poets began writing schematic villanelles.

<sup>13</sup> Designating French poetry as "essentially syllabic" is an oversimplification, but it seems to me to be the best way of emphasizing the vital but potentially invisible difference between English and French prosody for English-speakers. I am indebted to Professor Mary McKinley and to the work of Clive Scott for the late dawning of my own knowledge on the subject. For readers as unfamiliar with the niceties of French *mesures* as myself, I reproduce here a succinct but scrupulous paragraph from an appendix on "The Fundamentals of French Versification" in Clive Scott's *A Question of Syllables* (Cambridge UP: Cambridge and London, 1986):

French versification is to be distinguished from English versification (syllable-stress metre) by the following broad principles: the integrity of the French line depends on the number of its syllables rather than on the number and nature of its rhythmic segments (French: *mesures*, English, 'feet'); the position of French 'accents' (equivalent of English stresses) is determined by the syntactic structure of the line rather than by the inherent stress patterns on individual words; the French accent falls on the last accentuable syllable of each syntactic unit in the line, and since these units naturally vary in length, French rhythmic measures obey no law of recurrence and no principle of regularity, and thus have no connection with the notion of beat; because French accents are linked also with pitch, and because the French line always ends with an accentuated syllable, there is a natural tendency in French verse for the end of the line to coincide with a syntactical break, that is, to be endstopped; it is for this reason that enjambement is potentially a greater transgression in French verse than in English. Individual lines of verse in French

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thus have a peculiar rhythmic autonomy and the rhythms of one line in no way predict the rhythms of the line following. (198)

It should also be mentioned that there are experiments with non-syllabic meters in French, not least of which is the *vers mesurés* movement in which Jean Passerat took part in the sixteenth century. *Vers mesurés* are essentially the equivalent of quantitative verse in English; both are an attempt to reproduce the meter of classical Latin poetry through an emphasis on the duration of syllables rather than on the number of syllables.

<sup>14</sup> One of each appears in Annie Finch, ed., *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women* (Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1994). Carolyn B. Whitlow's "Rockin' A Man, Stone Blind" is accentual, and Cheryl Clarke's "What Goes Around Comes Around, or, The Proof is in the Pudding" is non-metrical.

<sup>15</sup> Kane does take issue with Scott's claim that "the form only became standardized in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., when prosodists such as Richelet based their definition on 'J'ay perdu ma tourterelle' by Jean Passerat" (1358). See Chapter One.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout, to avoid various kinds of confusion, I refer to the poem by its first line rather than by its title.

<sup>17</sup> Julie Ellen Kane is more inclined than McFarland to attribute a genuine folk derivation for the courtly *villanella*, which becomes important for her argument that the contemporary villanelle *does* in fact harken back to folk songs. I discuss this issue further below.

<sup>18</sup> For McFarland, all Renaissance villanelles except "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" are "irregular form villanelles" (43).

<sup>19</sup> This account of Passerat's life is chiefly drawn from the work of Roger Thomas Patterson, *Jean Passerat (1534-1602): A Critical Biography, Bibliography, and Study of Selected Works*, published dissertation (Belfast: Queen's University, 1994). Patterson conducts an extremely thorough and scholarly review of all previous biographies of Passerat, and his attention to previously undiscussed primary sources is outstanding. This biography is therefore clearly the most reliable of available sources on Passerat, as well

as the most recent, even though Patterson deliberately de-emphasizes Passerat's French poetry. See also Kathleen C. K. Merken, "Jean Passerat, Poet and Humanist," Unpublished dissertation (U of CA Berkeley, 1966), which gives greater consideration to Passerat's work in the vernacular. Other sources that have contributed to my understanding of Passerat have been Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1843); Charles Des Guerrois, *Jean Passerat, poète et savant* (Paris: Ledoyen, Schulz et Thuillie, 1856); Prosper Blanchemain, ed., *Les poésies françaises de Jean Passerat* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1880); and Arthur Augustus Tilley, *The Literature of the French Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1904). I have not been able to find any more recent texts that deal with Passerat's early work or life in any depth.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Bideaux, André Tournon, and Hélène Moreau, *Histoire de la littérature française du XVIe siècle, Études linguistiques et littéraires*, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Nathan, 1991) 188-99.

<sup>21</sup> The *Satyre Ménippée* was translated into English in 1595 under the title *A Pleasant Satyre or Poesie Wherein Is Discouered the Catholicon of Spayne, and the Chiefe Leaders of the League. Finelie Fetcht Ouer, and Laide Open in Their Colours. Newly Turned out of French into English*, by "Jean Le Roy" (London: Printed by the widdow Orwin for Thomas Man dwelling in Pater-noster row at the signe of the Talbot, 1595). French translations of *Nihil* appeared in 1581 by Marie Romieu and in 1599 by Philippes Girard, and English translations or imitations were produced by Edward Daunce in 1585 as *The Prayse of Nothing* and by William Cornwallis in 1616 in his *Essays of Certaine Paradoxes* (Patterson 202-12). See Ralph M. Sargent, "The Authorship of *The Prayse of Nothing*," *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* XII ser. 4 no. 3 (1932) for the re-attribution of *The Prayse of Nothing* from Sir Edward Dyer to Edward Daunce.

<sup>22</sup> See Fabrice Marin Caietain, and Jane A. Bernstein, *Airs mis en musique à quatre parties, premier livre: (1578)*, *The Sixteenth-Century Chanson* vol. 4 (New York: Garland, 1995), 200-11. Thanks as well to University of Michigan librarian Charles Reynolds for checking the microfilm of the original 1578 text.

<sup>23</sup> Kane 132-3. I have changed brackets in the original to parentheses in order to distinguish Kane's insertions from mine. Note that Kane translates the title of the lyric sequence as "The Monument for Fleurie by Niré," while I translate it more literally as "The Tombstone of Fleurie for Niré." Although the first-person lyrics in the sequence *are* presumably supposed to be in the voice of the grieving "Niré," there is still no reason that I can see to translate "pour" ("for") as "by" in this instance, as though Passerat were offering the authorship of the poems to Henri III.

<sup>24</sup> See Tilley I.295, II.123; Frederic J. Baumgartner, *France in the Sixteenth Century* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 217-26. The sonnet, of course, was one Italian import that survived handily.

<sup>25</sup> See Michel François, et al., *Lettres de Henri III, roi de France*, Société de l'histoire de France Publications in Octavo. 463 (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1959); Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III*, (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1986); Pierre Chevallier, *Henri III: roi Shakespearien* (Paris: Fayard, 1985); and Jean François Solnon, *Henri III: Un désir de majesté* ([Paris]: Perrin, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> This account is indebted to Baumgartner 217-30. See Tilley for a thorough account of the printing history of the much-in-demand *Satyre Ménippée*.

<sup>27</sup> These three sources are the following: François Barbin, et al., *Recueil des plus belles pieces des poëtes françois, tant anciens que modernes, depuis Villon jusqu' à M. de Benserade* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1692; reprinted 1752); A. Phérotée de La Croix, *L'art de la poësie françoise et latine, avec une ideé de la musique sous une nouvelle methode, Omnia in pondere, numero & mensura. En trois parties* (Lyon: Thomas Amaulry, 1694); and Pierre Richelet, Pierre Charles Berthelin, and Louis Barthelemy, *Dictionnaire de rimes* (Lyon: A. Leroy, 1751; new editions or printings in 1760; 1762, 1778, 1781, 1799, 1810, 1817, and 1973). See Kane 211-27 for a full discussion of these three works; note that the second source by Phérotée de la Croix is considered to be only a bastardized version of the Barbin *Recueil*.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Boulmier did read the sentence as prescribing that a villanelle should use only words rhyming with "elle" and "oi," in fact (10), but I think that he (and we) are simply expecting a prescribed form. The word "poëme" simply means "poem," and if the sentence is in fact establishing so rigorous a

scheme in tercets, it seems odd that the next sentence should describe villanelles as also having stanzas of six lines.

<sup>29</sup> Tilley II.57; Kane 128; and Sainte-Beuve 121.

<sup>30</sup> Further research by a Renaissance scholar certainly seems indicated; I would certainly like to know whether the practice of deliberately varying spelling for poetic effect was a common one in the early modern period. Perhaps Renaissance scholars have already explored this phenomenon extensively; I don't know. In the context of distinguishing between the oral-formulaic, improvisatory, mnemonic song tradition and the new text-centered madrigal of the Renaissance, Kane comments on the sixteenth-century phenomenon of "eye music," in which "features of the musical composition [...] were apparent to the *eyes* of the singer reading the score, but not necessarily to his or her *ears*. Words such as "day" or "light," for example, would be set to white notes (half, whole, and double whole notes, called *minims*, *semibreves*, and *breves*), while "darkness," "blindness," "night," "death," and "color" required black notes (quarter notes, called *semiminims*)" (*How* 53). As Kane notes, such a practice foreshadows George Herbert's experiments with visual poetic effects in the seventeenth century. Such examples show that, as seems natural, the increasing textuality of art in the sixteenth century led to artistic experiments with that textuality. Still, Passerat's homographia, while well worth preserving, does not seem boldly experimental in the same degree: it strikes me as produced by the same kind of tidying urge that produced the convention of capitalizing the first letter of every line of a poem regardless of its sentence structure. It is a purely visual, textual phenomenon, and as such can be taken as a comment on the visuality of texts—but in some cases that comment is only half-realized: it just looks better that way.

<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting here that the many sonnets in the *Tombeau de Fleurie pour Niré* are all on the same rhyme scheme, *abbaabba cdeed*, which lends weight to Kane's point that Passerat was not particularly inclined to make formal innovations. The only mildly innovative feature of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" is that it has two distinct refrains instead of one.

<sup>32</sup> In another chapter I discuss the imposition of meaning on poetic form in more detail; too often, critics seem to extrapolate the axiom that villanelles are *intrinsically* obsessive from the undeniably

accurate observation that contemporary villanelles often deal with obsession. Such axioms are historically constructed, I argue; for now it suffices to point out that Victorian and Edwardian accepted wisdom held that the villanelle was suited only to light subjects.

<sup>33</sup> A version of this section and the translation of "J'ay perdu ma Tourterelle" it contains appeared under the title "Lost Classic: Jean Passerat, 'J'ay perdu ma tourterelle' " *Meridian* 12 (2003) 30-7.

<sup>34</sup> George Wyndham, "Villanelle," *Ronsard and La Pléiade, with Selections from their Poetry and Some Translations in the Original Metres* (London and NY: Macmillan, 1906) 249-50; Wilfrid Charles Thorley, "Villanelle," *Fleurs-de-lys, a Book of French Poetry Freely Translated into English Verse* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1920) 90; William Frederic Giese, "Villanelle," *French Lyrics, in English Verse* (Madison, WI: The University Press, 1946) 67; John Payne, "Villanelle," *Flowers from France: The Renaissance Period, from Ronsard to Saint-Amant* (London: Villon Society, 1907): 132-3 reprinted in Huntington Cairns, *The Limits of Art* (Washington DC: Pantheon, 1948) 539; Elizabeth Gerteiny, "Villanelle (Jean Passerat: 1534-1602)," *Poet Lore* 68 (1973) 70; Philip K. Jason, "Modern Versions of the Villanelle," *College Literature* 7 (1980) 145; Anne Waldman, "Villanelle," *The Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*, ed. Ron Padgett and Teachers & Writers Collaborative (NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1987) 197-8. See also the admirably simple prose translation in Geoffrey Brereton, ed., *The Penguin Book of French Verse* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958) 91-2.

<sup>35</sup> Wyndham 189, 250; Edmund Gosse, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse," *Cornhill Magazine* 36 (1877) 65; George Saintsbury, ed., *French Lyrics* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887) 114.

<sup>36</sup> Throughout this chapter, I lump together French and English movements and genres such as Parnassianism, Art for Art's Sake, Hellenism, Aestheticism, Decadence, light verse, occasional verse, and *vers de société* under the sobriquet of "post-Romanticism." This does obscure the highly-contested distinctions between these categories that their participating authors would no doubt have insisted upon; some contemporary scholars of the period might also wish to take issue with my inexact terminology. Nevertheless, I have eliminated the redundancy of utter specificity in this case because in my view, the

matrix of contention that produces these distinctions is precisely the result of a much more evident resemblance between the movements in question. Freud proposed a similar thesis for the tendency of proximate ethnic communities to go to war with one another in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. I prefer to use a categorical term that emphasizes the similarities of these movements, all of which opposed utilitarian, socially conscious poetry in favor of lyrical individualism.

<sup>37</sup> See Henri Peyre, *What Is Romanticism?* trans. Roda Roberts (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977) 50-3.

<sup>38</sup> See Théophile Gautier, *Poésies complètes de Théophile Gautier*, ed. René Jasinski, 3 vols. (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1970) III.128 for the full text of "L'Art."

<sup>39</sup> The following account is drawn from the introduction to Patricia Joan Siegel, ed., *Wilhelm Ténint et sa Prosodie de l'école moderne: Avec des documents inédits* (Paris et Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1986) 7-53.

<sup>40</sup> For an account of the duel, see Pierre Pellissier, *Emile de Girardin, prince de la presse*, Collection divers faits (Paris: Denoël, 1985), 98-113.

<sup>41</sup> On Hugolian *trimètre*, see Clive Scott, *French Verse-Art: A Study* (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 66-68; on *Hernani*, see Théophile Gautier, *Victor Hugo* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1902).

<sup>42</sup> For some reason, both Ténint and Banville prefer the spelling "rythme" to the correct modern French spelling, "rythme." "Rhythme" seems to be a fairly common misspelling or alternate spelling in French. Throughout, I translate it as "form" rather than as "rhythm," since I believe the former translation better conveys the meaning of the term in the nineteenth-century context than the English cognate.

<sup>43</sup> For the text of Gautier's "Villanelle Rythmique," see Gautier, *Poésies complètes*, II.208. McFarland points out that Gautier's poem "attests to the renewal of interest in Renaissance forms" and that it "in subject matter and tone resembles the work of the Pléiade poets" (46), both of which I would agree with. But McFarland also considers the poem "irregular," since it is not on the Passerat model, which is a term I would not agree with, the form not having yet been regularized.



<sup>44</sup> The evidence for the genuine fame of Mickiewicz and of his two volumes of sonnets in Parisian Romantic circles of the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties is too copious to be listed here. See Jean Bourrilly, "Mickiewicz and France," *Adam Mickiewicz in World Literature: A Symposium*, ed. Waclaw Lednicki (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956) 243-79 and Zofia Mitosek, *Adam Mickiewicz aux yeux des Français : textes réunis, établis et présentés avec l'introduction, commentaires, et notes* (Warszawa and Paris: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Pwn Cnrs, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> It is unclear to me whether "pederasty" in this context means child molestation or homosexuality; I am inclined to think that it means a Hellenized version of the latter, but I would welcome other opinions.

<sup>46</sup> See Siegel 14.

<sup>47</sup> See Sylvain-Christian David, *Philoxène Boyer: un sale ami de Baudelaire* (Paris: Ramsay, 1987) 246-53. For the full text of "La Marquise Aurore," see Philoxène Boyer, *Les deux saisons* (Paris: A. LeMerre, 1867) 47-8.

<sup>48</sup> This translation is perhaps too literal; I am not quite sure what Banville means by "une petite Dunkerque" and "bijoux d'étagère." "Dunkirk" is perhaps an obsolete term for a jewelry box; in *Essays in Little Lang* writes that Banville calls the villanelle "the fairest jewel in the casket of the muse Erato," while in "A Plea For Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" Gosse translates the phrase "the most ravishing jewel worn by the Muse Erato." Also, "prémises," like its English cognate "premises," can mean either "foundations of logical argument" or "particular location." Since Boyer died in poverty, I think the translation "lodgings" is most likely, though perhaps Banville means to assert that Boyer has established new predicates for poetry.

<sup>49</sup> This publication history is chiefly taken from *OCLC WorldCat*, April 2004, <http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/>. See also Maximilien Fuchs, *Théodore de Banville (1823-1891)* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1972; first published Paris: Cornély, 1912) 420.

<sup>50</sup> I take issue to some extent with the term "French forms," especially in the case of the villanelle, which has so many more English examples than French examples. I do occasionally use the term while narrating the history of the revival of these forms, because their "Frenchness" was highly significant for the

post-Romantics and even for the modernists, but I think the term should be retired from contemporary handbooks. To my mind a more accurate and neutral term, also now in common usage, is "fixed forms." Continually designating certain forms as "French" emphasizes their foreignness to Anglophone poetry in an inevitably hierarchical way, even if the affective connotations of "Frenchness" have somewhat diminished for English-speakers. Or had, before the resurgence of ancient Francophobic tendencies in the international arguments over the war on Iraq.

<sup>51</sup> For journals to which Gosse contributed in this period, see Ann Thwaite, *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape, 1849-1928* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984) 129-30.

<sup>52</sup> See Clive Scott, *French Verse-Art: A Study* (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 157-64.

<sup>53</sup> See Edmund Gosse, *New Poems* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1879) 154-5 and W. Davenport Adams, ed., *Latter-Day Lyrics: Being Poems of Sentiment and Reflection by Living Writers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878) 312-13.

<sup>54</sup> The accidentals in these two texts match almost exactly.

<sup>55</sup> The two biographical dictionaries most likely to have included Boulmier are Jean Chrétien Ferdinand Hofer, *Nouvelle biographie générale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours, avec les renseignements bibliographiques et l'indication des sources à consulter* (Paris: Firmin Didot frères fils et cie, 1855) and Gustave Vapereau, *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1880).

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter One for a full discussion of the passage on the villanelle in the 1751 rhyming dictionary.

<sup>57</sup> All references taken from *OCLC WorldCat*, February 2004, <http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/>.

<sup>58</sup> From this point on I use the term "villanelle" to mean a poem on the nineteen-line alternating-refrain scheme.

<sup>59</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, 1989)

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<sup>60</sup> As a general rule in this period, the villanelle tended to be discussed in scholarly works dealing specifically with the history of French poetry and not in works dealing with poetry in English: George Saintsbury's monumental narrative work of scholarship *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (London and NY: Macmillan, 1906-10) did not discuss the villanelle, whereas the form was mentioned in Saintsbury's *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1882). The villanelle form was also explained and discussed in Gleeson White's *Ballades and Rondeaux, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, &C* (London, New York: W. Scott limited, 1887); Leon Kastner's *A History of French Versification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903); and Helen Louise Cohen's *Lyric Forms from France: Their History and Their Use* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1922).

Popular poetry handbooks and manuals, however, did frequently include the French forms even when their titles explicitly claimed to deal with English verse. One well-known versification manual that explained the villanelle was Tom Hood's *The Rhymester: Or, the Rules of Rhyme. A Guide to English Versification. With a Dictionary of Rhymes, an Examination of Classical Measures, and Comments Upon Burlesque, Comic Verse and Song-Writing* (London: John Hogg, 1869, 1877, 1880, 1892; New York: D. Appleton, 1882, 1891, 1896, 1902, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1916, 1921, 1928, 1929). This work had several slightly different titles, and was edited in its Appleton editions by Brander Matthews under the pseudonym "Arthur Penn." Its 1882 edition defers to Boulmier as an authority. Other versification manuals that described the villanelle included Francis Barton Gummere's *A Handbook of Poetics, for Students of English Verse* (Boston and London: Ginn, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1895, 1898, 1902, 1903, and 1913); Raymond Macdonald Alden's *English Verse; Specimens Illustrating Its Principles and History, English Readings* (NY: H. Holt and Company, 1903, 1937); and James Wilson Bright and Raymond Durbin Miller's *The Elements of English Versification* (Boston and London: Ginn, 1910, 1913).

<sup>61</sup> See note 15 to Chapter Two for an explanation of my concerns with the term "French forms," which I find unnecessarily nationalist and inaccurate (especially in the case of the villanelle). The term "fixed forms" is more exact, more neutral, more abstract--but this category would of course include the

sonnet, and Anglophone poets and scholars have historically maintained a rigid patriotic separation between the English sonnet and every other fixed form.

<sup>62</sup> See Hans Walter Gabler's introduction to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler and Walter Hettche (New York: Garland, 1993) 4-5 and Hans Walter Gabler, "The Seven Lost Years of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," *Approaches to Joyce's Portrait: Ten Essays*, ed. Thomas F. Staley and Bernard Benstock ([Pittsburgh]: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976). Gabler writes, "A manuscript section in chapter V clearly set off as an insert from its surroundings is the villanelle movement. Its sixteen manuscript pages are (but for the last one) inscribed with a different ink and a different slope of the hand on different paper" ("Seven" 44). Other evidence Gabler examines proves to his satisfaction that this section was transcribed and inserted after the rest of Chapter V had been completed; the manuscript is dated 1913, but parts of it, including the beginning of Chapter V, probably date from 1911. Gabler admits that the evidence of the villanelle movement's later insertion does not necessarily mean that it had been *written* later: "On the contrary, considering the marks of wear and tear on [the last page of the villanelle movement, which includes two lines of prose and the full text of the villanelle], it is not even out of the question that the villanelle section in an earlier unrevised state also belonged to the pages of the rescued 1911 manuscript" ("Seven" 45). In other words, the evidence that the villanelle scene was written in 1914 is inconclusive, but it probably does not predate 1911. "Villanelle of the Temptress" is mentioned by name in the manuscript of *Stephen Hero*, which dates from 1904-1906, but the full text of the villanelle is not given, nor is the scene of its composition described.

<sup>63</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*, 1st McGraw-Hill paperback edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 85-6. See also Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) 86. The passage in which Ellmann cites Stanislaus Joyce regarding the date of "Villanelle of the Temptress" does not appear in the revised edition of 1982.

<sup>64</sup> See Ellmann, 1959, 153-6 and Gabler, "Seven," 25.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 78-80, 401-2, 462-3.

<sup>66</sup> The central exchange over how Stephen's villanelle should be read and how judged took place between Wayne Booth and Robert Scholes in the early nineteen-sixties: see Wayne Booth, "The Problem of Distance in *A Portrait of the Artist*," *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1961) and Robert Scholes, "Stephen Dedalus, Poet or Esthete?" *PMLA* 79 (1964 Sept): 484-9. Both are reprinted in James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, Ed. Chester G. Anderson, The Viking Critical Library (New York: Viking Press, 1968). Booth asks, "Finally, what of the precious villanelle? Does Joyce intend it to be taken as a serious sign of Stephen's artistry, as a sign of his genuine but amusingly pretentious precocity, or as something else entirely?" (466); Scholes answers that "Joyce has deliberately set out in his description of Stephen's inspiration to fulfill the theoretical requirements he had himself set up for such inspiration. The inspiration and the poem are both intended to be genuine" (480). Booth declares that the degree of Joyce's distance from Stephen's villanelle cannot be determined, but his language ("the precious villanelle") shows that he, unlike Scholes, does not admire the poem. Most subsequent critics have tended toward an essentially Boothian reading, in which Joyce as author intends us to keep a certain ironic distance from "Villanelle of the Temptress," though not necessarily from Stephen's aesthetic theories nor from his intent to become an artist.

Other articles (in chronological order) that examine Joyce's villanelle are Charles Rossman, "Stephen Dedalus' Villanelle," *James Joyce Quarterly* 12 (1975): 281-93; Bernard Benstock, "The Temptation of St. Stephen: A View of the Villanelle," *James Joyce Quarterly* 14.31-8 (1976); Mary T. Reynolds, "Joyce's Villanelle and D'annunzio's Sonnet Sequence," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5 (1976): 19-45; Zack Bowen, "Stephen's Villanelle: Antecedents, Manifestations, and Aftermath," *Modern British Literature* 5 (1980): 63-7; Manfred Pfister, "Die Villanelle in Der Englischen Moderne: Joyce, Empson, Dylan Thomas," *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 219.2 (1982): 296-312; Angela Habermann, "The Joycean Faun," *International Fiction Review* 10.1 (1983): 44-7; Robert Adams Day, "The Villanelle Perplex: Reading Joyce," *James Joyce Quarterly* 25.1 (1987): 69-85; and Christine Froula, "Modernity, Drafts, Genetic Criticism: On the Virtual Lives of James Joyce's Villanelle," *Yale*

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*French Studies* 89 (1996): 113-29. The best of these, to my mind, is Day's 1987 article, whose conclusions I cite in my own text.

<sup>67</sup> See Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, An Atlantic Monthly Press Book (Boston: Little Brown, 1965) 326. In a written response to questions from a student writing a thesis on Thomas, the poet wrote:

I cannot say that I have been "influenced" by Joyce, whom I enormously admire and whose *Ulysses*, and earlier stories, I have read a great deal. I think this Joyce question arose because somebody once, in print, remarked on the closeness of the title of my book of short stories, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog," to Joyce's title, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." As you know, the name given to innumerable portrait paintings by their artist is, "Portrait of a Young Man"--a perfectly straightforward title. Joyce used the painting title for the first time as the title of a literary work. I myself made a bit of doggish fun of the painting-title and, of course, intended no possible reference to Joyce. I do not think that Joyce has had any hand at all in my writing; certainly his *Ulysses* has not. On the other hand, I cannot deny that the shaping of some of my "Portrait" stories might owe something to Joyce's stories in the volume, "Dubliners." But then "Dubliners" was a pioneering work in the world of the short story, and no good storywriter since can have failed, in some way, however little, to be benefited by it. (qtd. in Fitzgibbon 326)

Fitzgibbon reports that this document was written "in the summer of 1951," which is also when Thomas was writing "Do not go gentle" (323).

<sup>68</sup> Interestingly enough, Dowson's 1894 "Villanelle of Marguerites" seems to be the first villanelle in iambic pentameter, Dowson's other four villanelles, like those written by the Anglophone post-Romantics, are tetrameter or trimeter. The second villanelle to be written in pentameter would be Empson's "Villanelle" ("It is the pain, it is the pain endures") of 1928. The use of pentameter undoubtedly shows both that English models were in general separating from French models and that Empson in particular was trying to make the villanelle more respectable.

<sup>69</sup> See Thomas F. Grieve, *Ezra Pound's Early Poetry and Poetics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997) 102-4.

<sup>70</sup> This text is taken from Ezra Pound, *Lustra* (NY: Knopf, 1917). It represents a substantial revision from the text printed in *Poetry* in 1915. The changes are all in the first section of the poem: Pound altered lineation and punctuation; added the four lines after "diverse forces"; removed the final line, which ran "Youth would hear speech of beauty," and made other small changes. On April 13, 1917 Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, editors of *Poetry*, complaining about the fact that they had used the earlier version from *Poetry*, rather than the revised version from his own *Lustra*, in their compilation *The New Poetry; an Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1917). See Ezra Pound, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Ira Bruce Nadel, *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) 206. Also, it should be noted that there was an edition of *Lustra* printed privately in 1916 that contained a version of the poem with at least one substantive variant ("least" for "last"). The version as reprinted in the *New Poetry* anthology was as follows:

I.

I had over-prepared the event--  
                   that much was ominous.  
 With middle-aging care  
                   I had laid out just the right books,  
 I almost turned down the right pages.

*Beauty is so rare a thing . . .  
 So few drink of my fountain.*

So much barren regret!  
 So many hours wasted!  
 And now I watch from the window  
                   rain, wandering busses.

Their little cosmos is shaken--  
                   the air is alive with that fact.  
 In their parts of the city  
                   they are played on by diverse forces;

I had over-prepared the event.  
*Beauty is so rare a thing . . .  
 So few drink of my fountain.*

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Two friends: a breath of the forest . . .  
 Friends? Are people less friends  
     because one has just, at last, found them?

Twice they promised to come.  
     "*Between the night and morning?*"

*Beauty would drink of my mind.*  
 Youth would awhile forget  
     my youth is gone from me.  
 Youth would hear speech of beauty.

II.

("Speak up! You have danced so stiffly?  
 Someone admired your works,  
 And said so frankly.

"Did you talk like a fool,  
 The first night?  
 The second evening?"

"*But they promised again:*  
     "Tomorrow at tea-time."")

III.

Now the third day is here--  
     no word from either;  
 No word from her nor him,  
 Only another man's note:  
     "Dear Pound, I am leaving England."

<sup>71</sup> See Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska; A Memoir* (NY: John Lane, 1916).

<sup>72</sup> Text taken from *Punch* 149 (1915 Dec 8) 468.

<sup>73</sup> See Daniel G. Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988); Maria Tippett, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art, and the Great War* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1984); and Jonathan Franklin William Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> For song scores based on McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" published between 1917 and 1919 (none appeared in 1916), see *OCLC WorldCat*, online database, accessed June 2004, available:

<http://www.oclc.org/worldcat/>.



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<sup>75</sup> See Moina Belle Michael and Leonard Roan, *The Miracle Flower: The Story of the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company, 1941).

<sup>76</sup> Other reply poems included R. W. Lillard's "America's Answer"; C. B. Galbreath's "In Flanders Fields (An Answer)"; John Mitchell's "Reply to In Flanders Fields"; and A. Armstrong's "Reply to In Flanders Fields": these too all vaguely resembled McCrae's rondeau at first glance, but had nonce schemes based on rhymed couplets.

<sup>77</sup> There are instances of early villanelles that vary the refrain as the poem progresses, though not many, and not many good examples. One very early amateur example is an 1879 villanelle by Sydney Starr published in the *Irish Monthly* (see Appendix II) in which the refrain "What would she think, what would she say?" becomes the final line " 'Esther, I love thee'--this will I say!" In general, the post-Romantic writers such as Gosse seemed to hold that the refrain should not vary.

<sup>78</sup> When asked about my dissertation, I say that it is a history of a poetic form called the villanelle. People usually look blank. I then say, "Probably the best-known villanelle is Dylan Thomas's 'Do not go gentle into that good night' of 1951." Brows clear, and people say, "Oh, yes." Sometimes they add cheerfully, " 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light.' "

<sup>79</sup> On the intellectualism of the Auden group, the Movement, and other poets of the period, see Peter Edgerly Firchow, *W.H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, Associated University Presses, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Eberhart, who had been at Cambridge with Empson, would himself publish a villanelle seventeen years later: "Christ is walking in your head today," *Spectrum* (1957 Winter).

<sup>81</sup> See the following reviews reprinted in John Constable, ed., *Critical Essays on William Empson* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1993). The original citation information as given in Constable is followed by a cross-reference in parentheses: L. M. [Louis MacNeice], "Mr. Empson as Poet," *New Verse* 16 (1935) 17-18 (Constable 58); F. C. [Fletcher Cooke], "Poems, by William Empson," *The Granta* 45 (1935) 17 (Constable 59); H. A. Mason, "William Empson's Verse," *Scrutiny* 4 (1935) 302-4 (Constable 69-70); I. A. R. [I. A. Richards], "Empson's Poems," *The Cambridge Review* 57 (1936) 253 (Constable 76-

8); W. H. Mellers, "Cats in Air-Pumps (Or Poets in 1940)," *Scrutiny* 9 (1940) 290-3 (Constable 109-11); Richard Eberhart, "Empson's Poetry," reprinted from Kerker Quinn and Charles Shattuck, eds., *Accent Anthology: Selections from Accent, A Quarterly of New Literature, 1940-1945* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1946) 571-88 (Constable 153). The original publication date of Eberhart's review is not known, but it seems likely that it appeared soon after Empson's *The Gathering Storm* came out in 1940.

<sup>82</sup> See Humphrey Carpenter, *W.H. Auden, a Biography*, 1st American edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981) 279.

<sup>83</sup> "Are You There [Alone]." *Harper's Bazaar* (1941 March 15); "But I Can't [If I Could Tell You]." *Vice Versa* (1941 Jan-Feb): 19. Both are reprinted in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (NY: Random House, 1945).

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Kirsch reports that "The poem was written from 1942 to 1944, in the midst of World War II" (*Sea* vii). Auden, controversially, was living as an expatriate in the United States at that time.

<sup>85</sup> Text taken from *Horizon* 5.30 (1942): 6.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Saltmarshe, John Davenport, and Basil Wright, eds., *Cambridge Poetry 1929* (London: Hogarth, 1929) and Alida Klemantaski Monro, ed., *Recent Poetry 1923-1933* (London: Gerald Howe and The Poetry Bookshop, 1933).

<sup>87</sup> See Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-1953*, ed. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: Dent, 1988) 255 and James A. Davies, *A Reference Companion to Dylan Thomas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998) 81.

<sup>88</sup> See *Collected Poems* 1988 255; Davies 81.

<sup>89</sup> See Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, An Atlantic Monthly Press Book (Boston: Little Brown, 1965) 354.

<sup>90</sup> I am indebted to my thinking about order and disorder in poetry to Gregory Orr, with whom I have studied creative writing.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas's legendary persona was that of Dionysus, but if anything is clear from his letters and from various accounts of his last years, it is that he was not enjoying himself--whatever it might have looked like.

<sup>92</sup> See R. B. Kershner Jr., *Dylan Thomas: The Poet and His Critics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976) 177-80 and John Ackerman, *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford UP, 1964; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 5-9.

<sup>93</sup> The most important of these biographies, some of which I have already cited, are as follows: Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas*, Atlantic Monthly Press (Boston: Little Brown, 1965); John Ackerman, *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford UP, 1964; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Paul Ferris, *Dylan Thomas: The Biography*, New edn. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977, 1999; Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999, 2000); and Andrew Lycett, *Dylan Thomas: A New Life*, 1st edn. (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2004). See also James A. Davies, *A Reference Companion to Dylan Thomas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), which includes both biography and commentary.

<sup>94</sup> In 2002, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Dylan Thomas's 1952 recording of *A Child's Christmas in Wales* for Caedmon, a complete collection of Dylan Thomas recordings was released on CD: *Dylan Thomas CD: The Caedmon Collection*, HarperAudio 2002.

<sup>95</sup> John Davies reads "Do not go gentle into that good night" and the late poems altogether differently; for him, the villanelle represents Thomas's mature homage to his father's "suburbanite" and "gentle'-manly" values. He writes, "If, as has been suggested, poetic formality in Thomas's work is expressive of the ordering, conforming impulse essential to middle-classness, then these late works are the most bourgeois of poems" (211-12).

<sup>96</sup> Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems, 1934-1952* (London: J.M. Dent, 1952); *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions Books, 1953).

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<sup>97</sup> Fussell, of course, might simply dislike the French forms; we remember that in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory* he condemned the rondeau "In Flanders Fields" on both moral and technical grounds.

<sup>98</sup> These numbers are taken from the back cover of *Merriam-Webster's Rhyming Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1995) and from the introduction to Philippe Martinon and Robert Lacroix de l'Isle's *Dictionnaire des rimes Françaises, précédé d'un traité de versification* (Paris: Larousse, 1962) 6. I was unable to find a more recent French rhyming dictionary that gives information as to the number of rhymesets or words it contains.

<sup>99</sup> See Léon Warnant, *Dictionnaire des rimes orales et écrites* (Paris: Larousse, 1973) 183-9 on the sound "ei" and *Merriam-Webster's Rhyming Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1995) 242-3 on the sound "ite."