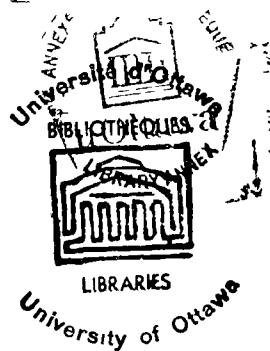


THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
VILLANELLE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

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of the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts.



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the history of the villanelle from its origin in mediaeval France and Renaissance Italy to the period when one of its forms became dominant and, thenceforth, characteristic of the villanelle as it is now known; to account for the neglect of the form from the seventeenth century until its revival in nineteenth century France; to examine its introduction into English literature later in the same century; and to scrutinize its development in form and content in the twentieth century. As each stage of this history is presented, representative villanelles will be examined as examples of current practice and development of the form, with a view to achieving a better understanding of the dynamics of the villanelle.

It is postulated that the practice of representative poets in using the villanelle form is generally of greater avail and validity than the prescription of prosodists in revealing the latent capacity of a poetic form. This postulate has determined the principle of selection for the villanelles presented in this study. Examples are not given of villanelles which, whatever their poetic merit, do not afford significant illustration either of current practice or of precedent for innovation and evolution, nor is it assumed that all the villanelles of a given author need be presented in order adequately to illustrate his contribution to the history and development of the villanelle.

This thesis represents an attempt to present a history of the villanelle which is both descriptive and analytical in nature. It is divided into three chapters corresponding to the three main stages of that history: origins and development of the villanelle in France; introduction and assimilation of the form into English literature; evolution and growth in the twentieth century.

Throughout this study, particular attention will be paid to the interaction of prosodic theory and poetic practice in effecting the evolution of the villanelle in form and subject matter, and therefore comparisons and parallels will at times be drawn between the practice of various poets at various stages in the history of the villanelle. In particular, recourse will be had to this method in the chapter dealing with the villanelle of the twentieth century, when a new seriousness and broadening of scope raises issues about the nature and essential characteristics of the villanelle, issues which are seen as crucial to its further development as a living poetic form.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the history of the villanelle and a discussion of the contribution made by each of the chief elements of the form to its development as an effective vehicle of poetic expression. From this discussion, a synthesis is drawn expressive of the essential qualities of the villanelle whereby the form may be better understood and appreciated.

CHAPTER I
THE ORIGINS, DEFINITION AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE VILLANELLE IN FRANCE

There are three origins to be considered for the poetic form now designated by the term 'villanelle': the virelai-villanelle derived from the early mediaeval rondet, rondel or rondeau; the villanella written in imitation of Italian rustic song-dances; and the Renaissance villanelle, one form of which as used by Jean Passerat (1534-1602) became the model for the poetic form now generally referred to as the villanelle. In Section 1 of this chapter, it is proposed firstly to consider these three origins and to trace the relationship among them, examining how the form used by Passerat came to be accepted as the model followed since the Renaissance. Section 2 will relate the revival of the villanelle in France towards the end of the nineteenth century and present a representative sampling of prescription and comment by prosodists and historians of French literature since that time. Throughout the chapter, examples of the various types of poem referred to will be examined to illustrate the origin and development of the villanelle.

Section 1

Origins and Development of the Villanelle

The popular origins of lyric poetry in all literatures are generally admitted¹, and with respect to the origins of lyric poetry in

¹Alfred Jeanroy, Les Origines de la Poésie Lyrique en France au Moyen Age (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1925), p. xvii et seq.

France, may be traced to the practice among the people, observed as early as the fifth century, of guiding dance movements by voice, beating of hands or stamping of feet, for want of musical instruments¹. Refrains were an essential part of the songs called "chansons de carole, rondets, rondets de carole"², terms descriptive of dancing in a ring.

The sophisticated artistic development of such peasant dance songs gave rise to the rondel or rondeau, which in turn became subdivided into such forms as the triolet, rondeau double and virelai³. In this process of development, the further evolution of the virelai is of particular significance for the study of the first origin of the villanelle:

A virelai could become double or triple by the simple device of repeating the rime scheme of strophes two and three after the refrain, which is strophe one or some portion thereof, has been restated for the first time. A virelai double would then consist of strophe one, the refrain; strophe two; strophe three; refrain. A virelai triple would add strophe two, strophe three, and refrain, to the arrangement just noted. Too many statements of the refrain, especially if it be a long one, conduce to tedium. The villanelle (in which the strophes are of three lines, the refrains being stated as lines one and three of strophe one, and then alternately as line three of the remaining strophes until the last, a four-line strophe, in which both refrains are restated as lines three and four, the conclusion of the poem) is an offshoot of an irregular type of virelai, attractively illustrated in Eustache Deschamps' "Sui je, sui je, sui je belle," in Renaissance times by Jean Passerat's "J'ai perdu ma tourterelle," the classical example of the villanelle. ⁴

¹Jeanroy, p. 388. Jeanroy quotes Sidonius Apollinaris of Lyons (c.430-c.480): "Castalidumque choris vario modulamine plaussit/Carminibus, cannis, pollice, voce, pede".

²Loc. cit.

³Warner Forrest Patterson, Three Centuries of French Poetic Theory: A Critical History of the Chief Arts of Poetry in France, 1328-1630, 3 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), I, p. 58.

⁴Loc. cit.

This theory, based on the internal evidence of the similarity of structure between the virelai and the model of the modern villanelle, is attractive in that it provides the villanelle with an origin coeval and consistent with that of the rondeau, rondel and triolet. The poem by Eustache Deschamps (c.1346-c.1406) referred to by Patterson as the type which "came to be called a villanelle of the sort revived, as we know, by Jean Passerat in the sixteenth century"¹, deserves examination as the mediaeval antecedent of the villanelle:

Virelai

Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

Il me semble, a mon avis,
Que j'ay beau front et doulz viz
Et la bouche vermeillette;
Dittes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay vers yeulx, petis sourcis,
Le chief blond, le nez traitis,
Ront menton, blanche gorgette;
Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

J'ay dur sain et hault assis,
Lons bras, gresles doys aussis,
Et par le faulz sui greslette;
Dittes moi se je sui belle.

J'ay bonnes rains, ce m'est vis,
Bon dos, bon cul de Paris,
Cuisses et gambes bien faictes;
Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

J'ay piez rondès et petiz,
Bien chaussans, et biaux habis,
Je sui gaye et foliette;
Dittes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay mantiaux fourrez de gris,
J'ay chapiaux, j'ay biaux proffis
Et d'argent mainte espinglette;
Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

J'ay draps de soye et tabis,
J'ay draps d'or et blancs t bis,
J'ay mainte bonne chosette;
Dittes moy se je sui belle.

Que .XV. ans n'ay, je vous dis;
Moult est mes tresors jolys,
S'en garderay la clavette;
Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

¹Patterson, vol. III, p. 154, n.

Bien devra estre hardis
 Cilz qui sera mea amis,
 Qui ara tel damoiselle;
 Dittes moy se je sui belle.

Et par Dieu je le plevi
 Que tresloyal, se je vis,
 Li seray, si ne chancelle;
 Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

Se courtois est et gentilz,
 Vaillans, apers, bien apers,

Il gaignera sa querelle;
 Dittes moy se je sui belle.

C'est un mondains paradiz
 Que d'avoir dame toudis,
 Ainsi fresche, ainsi nouvelle;
 Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?

Entre vous accouardiz,
 Pensez a ce que je diz;
 Cy fine ma chansonelle;
 Sui je, sui je, sui je belle? ¹

This poem presents a catalogue of a lady's charms, beginning with the most particular and physical, then enumerating her various possessions and qualities, and ending with the advantages of having her as one's lady. The poem is on three rhymes, as compared with the later villanelle's two. Of particular note are the two syntactical forms of the refrain, one interrogative, "Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?", and the other imperative, "Dittes moy se je sui belle.", both refrains remaining closely related in tone and content, with only the syntactical form providing a rudimentary form of variation. The theme of the poem is the lady's charms, and by their syntactical form the refrains involve the reader: "Am I, am I, am I beautiful? Tell me whether I am beautiful."

In the first eight strophes, as long as the lady is enumerating her physical charms and material possessions, the refrains do not rhyme with the other lines of each strophe. But in the last six strophes by reference to the qualities of her personality and to the general advantages of having her as one's lady, a more personal appeal is made to the listener, evinced by the closer relationship suggested by having the

¹Patterson, III, p. 154.

refrain rhyme with the third line of each strophe. This effect of greater harmony is enhanced by the increase from only two rhyming lines per strophe in the first eight strophes, to all four lines rhyming in the last six strophes. This greater harmony and the closer integration of refrains in the last six strophes represent the only formal development in the poem, the tone of the speaker remaining fairly uniform. As exemplified by this poem, the virelai of the villanelle type, with its two refrains related in a simple way and which do not alter or develop in meaning throughout the poem, nevertheless suggests the possibility of a more functional use of the refrain.

The second origin of the villanelle, and the source which provided the form with its name is to be found in Italy. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Italian rustic song-dances and street songs variously called 'villanelle', 'villotte', or 'villanesche' became fashionable throughout Europe as a form of pastoral poetry often set to music¹. The only French literary historian to devote an entire work to the villanelle notes that towards the end of the sixteenth century the term 'villanelle' came simply to designate a tender and amorous love-song, "une espèce de romance tendre et galante", or a slightly bawdy ditty, "une chansonnette passablement leste et grivoise"². The term villanella is still used in

¹Charles Burney, A General History of Music, 3 vols. (1789; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1957), III, 174.

²Joseph Boulmier, Villanelles (Paris: Isidore Liseux, Editeur, 1878), p. 2. Boulmier traces the term villanelle to the Italian and Spanish word for peasant, villano, similar to the French vilain, all terms being derived from the Latin villa, country estate. He is the only literary historian encountered to relate the villanelle to the Spanish villancete and villancico, which correspond to the French "cantilène", sung by a peasant chorus as a naive and pious Nativity play at Christmas, or as a pastoral song to accompany rustic dances in Spring.

English for an unaccompanied part-song of light, rustic character¹, and as a poem without established rules, generally on a rustic topic, continues to be written and is a form of lyric favored by composers of music². Further study of this type of poem, the use of which has continued to the present day, is not immediately germane to this thesis, except perhaps to serve as a precedent for later acceptance of some degree of licence in the rules governing the villanelle form and as a reminder of its lyrical antecedents.

The third and final origin of the villanelle is to be found in Renaissance France. With the spread to France in mid-sixteenth century of literary fashions and ideas associated with the Italian Renaissance, chiefly through the influence of the poets of la Pléiade,³ the use of mediaeval forms such as the rondeau, rondel, ballade, triolet and virelai became less frequent:

After 1548, the sonnet, of which Ronsard, DuBellay and Louise Labé were the great artists; the villanelle (fixed form type), in which Jean Passerat revived an

¹This distinction does not obtain in French, where a villanelle may designate the form fixed after Passerat, a simple pastoral or popular song in the Italian fashion, or a polyphonic composition. Apart from the Latin derivation from villa, the chief cause for the variety of derived terms may be historical: Charles VIII's invasion of Naples in 1495 involved the principal European powers in a series of Italian wars which incidentally served to spread Italian ideas and fashions throughout Europe, so that the Neapolitan villanella or villanesco -- the diminutive endings in ella or esco suggesting 'little country songs' -- when it reached France or Spain, was modified to suit French or Spanish usage.

²Cf. Hector Berlioz's setting of "Villanelle" in his song-cycle "Les Nuits d'Été" based on poems of Théophile Gautier. See A.E.F. Dickinson, The Music of Berlioz (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 112, and Théophile Gauthier, "Villanelle Rhythmique," Poésies Complètes (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1970). Vol. II, p. 208.

³A group of French poets of the sixteenth century, led by Pierre de Ronsard, the most notable members being DuBellay, Pontus de Tyard, Etienne Jodelle and Rémy Belleau.

arrangement known to Eustache Deschamps as an irregular virelai; the villanelle or villanesque (simple rustic song) practiced by DuBellay, Jacques Grévin and Desportes; the Sestina, of which Pontus de Tyard composed a few examples; all of these take the place of the older fixed forms (rondeau, rondel, triolet, ballade, virelai) of the Middle French poets, unless one counts the archaistic revival of them in the seventeenth century. Of these new forms, only the sonnet merits serious consideration . . . The other forms remained experiments, occasionally attractive.¹

In 1549, DuBellay published the poetic manifesto of the Pléiade, La Défense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise, in which he advised poets to study Greek and Latin models, and to leave to provincial festivals old French forms such as rondeaux, ballades, virelais, rhyme royal, chansons and other sweetmeats which corrupt the taste of language and testify to ignorance². DuBellay does not include the villanelle among these older forms, leading one critic to conclude from DuBellay's use of the form that it must have been of recent origin, and not one of the old mediaeval forms towards which he had expressed such hostility³. If DuBellay felt the need to denounce the use of the old French forms, it is reasonable to assume that he was familiar with them, that they were still in use and that he did not associate the villanelle form he used with the virelai form described by Patterson and used by Deschamps⁴.

¹Joachim du Bellay, La Défense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise (Paris: Arnoul l'Angelier, 1549), Chap. IIII, n. pag.

²Ibid. The text in question is as follows:

Quels genres de poèmes doit elire le poète François.
Ly donques, et rely premierement (ô Poète futur), fueillete de main nocturne et journalle, les exemplaires Grecz et Latins, puis me laisse toutes ces vieilles poésies françoises aux Jeux Floraux de Toulouse, et au Puy de Rouan: comme Rondeaux, Ballades, Virelaiz, Chantz Royaulx, Chansons et autres telles epiceries, qui corrompent le goust de nostre Langue et ne servent sinon à porter tesmoignage de nostre ignorance.

³Jean de Suberville, Histoire et Théorie de la Versification

French prosodists agree that before the form used by Jean Passerat was adopted as the model for the fixed form type of villanelle, the poets of the Pléiade such as DuBellay, Grévin and Desportes had imitated the "song in rustic style", alla villanella favored in Italy, and that for the French imitations, this was not a fixed form¹. Before considering the model for the fixed form type of villanelle, it is proposed to examine examples of villanelles written by Passerat's contemporaries, beginning with DuBellay, since the fixed-form type of villanelle is an offshoot of a Renaissance genre certain of whose characteristics provide a valuable precedent for later poets who might prefer a less strictly structured form of villanelle.

Villanesque²

J'ay trop servi de fable au populaire
En vous aymant, trop ingrate maistresse:
Suffise vous d'avoir eu ma jeunesse.

J'ay trop cherché les moyens de complaire
A vos beaux yeux, causes de ma detresse:
Suffise vous d'avoir eu ma jeunesse.

Il vous falloit me tromper ou m'attirer
Dedans vos lacs d'une plus fine adresse:
Suffise vous d'avoir eu ma jeunesse.

Française (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole, 1968), p. 223.

⁴See above, p. 5.

¹W. Theodor Elwert, Traité de Versification Française des Origines à Nos Jours, trans. Französische Metrik, (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1965), p. 176. See also Boulmier, p. 2, Suberville, p. 223, and Jeanroy, p. 387.

²The terms villanelle and villanesque are used interchangeably by authors consulted, English or French, who use both terms, but the use of villanesque has not been encountered in referring to the fixed form type of villanelle. See above, p. 7 n.1.

Car la raison commence à se distraire
 Du fol amour qui trop cruel m'opprime:
 Suffise vous d'avoir eu ma jeunesse.¹

The poem consists of four tercets in two rhymes (ABB), both feminine, each tercet concluding with the same refrain, answering to the first two lines of the tercet. The poem is a lover's complaint and renunciation of love, the complaint element being chiefly suggested by the refrain: "Let it suffice you to have had my youth". The first line of each tercet presents its theme, and if one reads these first lines in sequence, the development of the argument of the poem becomes clear: "I've been too much a figure of derision (Line 1); I've tried too hard to please (Line 4); You should have fooled me or caught me (Line 7); For reason is become restive" (Line 10).

The second line is always a continuation of the first, without punctuation, the two lines constituting one statement for which the refrain provides the answering comment. The second line completes the first and introduces some element of the mistress or of the love itself. It is to be noted that from the first to the last tercet, the attention in these second lines gradually switches from the mistress to the cruel and foolish love. This development reflects the evolution of the whole poem, with the mistress being gradually eliminated.

Although the single refrain remains verbally invariable, its sense changes throughout the poem by association with the two preceding lines to which it is an answer or comment. In the first tercet, the sense

¹Patterson, III, p. 380.

suggests "I've been held up as a bad example; now you will have to be satisfied with having had my youth." The second tercet suggests "I've tried too hard to please your distressing eyes, though you already had my youth." The third tercet intimates "You should have fooled me or caught me more cleverly, though you had already caught my youth." And the final tercet completes the process: "Reason is starting to turn away from this cruel love; it's enough to have lost my youth to you."

Among the characteristics of this villanesque which deserve mention as a contribution to the development of the villanelle is its subtle unity in tracing the process of disillusionment and the delicate change of sense imparted to the refrain while avoiding any suggestion of superficial cleverness. The refrain retains the effect of repeated complaint, and the choice of refrain, "Be satisfied with having had my youth", has the bittersweet quality of regret for youthful folly. The poem exhibits a simple diction and the avoidance of any trite classical or pastoral allusion, its use of imagery being restrained, as in the image of the hunt in the third stanza.

Two other villanelles by DuBellay are more closely related to the villanella, being songlike and rustic in nature, "A Winnower of Wheat to the Winds" and "To Marguerite"¹. The first is a villanelle without refrain, and the second has a refrain at the end of each strophe, directing its meaning. Neither poem presents characteristics not better exemplified in "The Ungrateful Mistress".

¹See Appendix, p. 186.

The following villanelle by Etienne Jodelle affords a further example of the wide variety of villanelle forms in use during the French Renaissance. The poem illustrates the importance of the refrain in achieving unity without monotony.

Vilanelle

Cent foys j'ay tasché me distraire
Des feux d'un amoureux pensers
Mais je n'ay peu tant avancer
Car le destin m'est adversaire.

C'est un mal qui m'est ordinaire
D'aymer ce que j'avoy domté
Je sçay bien sa legereté
Mais quoy? le destin m'est contraire.

C'est bien le Ciel qui peust substraire
Mon coeur, ma flame et mon devoir
Ce que je veux est sans pouvoir
Car j'ay le Destin adversaire.

Rien que mon mal ne me peust plaire
C'est bien mon mal que de l'aymer
Semblable aux vagues de la mer
Mais quoy! le destin m'est contraire.

J'ay beau mile sermens me faire
Puis qu'un seul trait d'affexion
Guaigne ma resolution
Car j'ay le Destin adversaire.

L'amour n'est rien qu'une misere
Ostant les yeux, la liberté
Ostant mesme la volonté
Lors qu'on a le destin contraire.

Seul destin qui fait me desplaire
Ce que je deusse plus aymer
N'aymant rien qu'à me consumer
Au feu d'un destin adversaire.

Telle qu'une onde passagere
Qui trainne une moisson de fleurs
Je vois enlever mes ardeurs
Aux flos de mon destin contraire.

C'est pourquoy je me désespere
 Ne pouvant rien sur mon vouloir
 Esclave d'un autre pouvoir
 Quand le destin m'est adversaire.¹

The nine quatrains in octosyllabic verse constitute a series of reflections on the linked theme of bad luck and disillusionment in love. Refrains three and five are identical, and so are refrains two and four except for punctuation. The words "destin adversaire" or "destin contraire" recur in each. The function of the refrain is to provide for each stanza an explanation or conclusion in which the poet describes the state of his love or reflects upon its hopelessness. The rhyme scheme is ABBA, with only the feminine rhyme in "aire" remaining constant.

From strophe to strophe, Jodelle varies the refrain slightly to reflect the content of the strophe and to summarize the gradual development in tone and feeling. The first refrain simply gives the excuse for the speaker not being able to free himself from the thought of love. In the second strophe, after he has acknowledged awareness of his propensity for love, in the refrain the speaker refers this propensity to bad luck. Only heaven can deliver him, his will has no power in this matter and that is his bad luck--such is the burden of the fourth strophe. Only his affliction can please him, bad luck! Vows are no good, since an affectionate glance wins over his resolution (fifth strophe). The sixth strophe fairly summarizes the lessons of the first five: love is mere misery, taking away sight, liberty and even will, when one has an unlucky fate. Again

¹ Etienne Jodelle, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Enea Balmas (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1955), I, p. 318.

the refrain repeats the condition of these misfortunes.

The refrain in the last four strophes is not linked to the rest of the strophe by a conjunction and is less separated from it than was the case in the first five strophes. In the last four strophes, contrary or hostile fate seems to be taken for granted, and this is reflected in the more subordinate function of the refrain in the concluding sentence of each strophe. In strophe seven, the speaker is consumed by the fire of an adverse fate, in strophe eight, his ardor is likened to flowers borne away on the waves of a hostile fate. The last strophe summarizes the whole poem by giving the reason for his despair, slave as he is to another power, when his is an adverse fate.

Noteworthy in this villanelle is the ease with which the train of thought in the poem and in each strophe leads to the refrain which always forms an organic part of the strophe and never seems merely tacked on to it. The repetition of "hostile" or "adverse fate" contributes to the unity of the poem, but the variety of tone and suggestion in the refrains keeps the poem free of monotony, a variety made easier by slight grammatical or syntactical variation in the refrains.

Finally, Philippe Desportes' (1546-1606) "The Inconstant Shepherdess"¹ affords an example of a refrain which varies slightly from strophe to strophe, lending itself easily to repetition, not ringing any changes in meaning or reflecting any development in thought throughout the poem. It is a rustic villanelle of song-like character in four eight-line stanzas,

¹See Appendix, p. 187.

with a two-line refrain, "We'll see, fickle shepherdess, who will be sorry first".

One critic has referred to Jean Passerat (1534-1602) as being, in a sense, the inventor of the villanelle¹, since his villanelle "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" became from the seventeenth century onwards, the model of the fixed-form type of villanelle². Pierre Richelet (c. 1631-1698) has been identified as the prosodist who first "reserved the term villanelle for one of [the] rustic songs by Jean Passerat"³ or who gave it as an example in his treatise on metrics⁴.

Actually, it is not in his La Versification Française⁵ but in his Dictionnaire de Rimes that Richelet mentions the villanelle: "La villanelle est une chanson de bergers. En voici une de Jean Passerat . . . Ce petit poeme est partagé par tercets, tous sous deux rimes en elle et en oi; & les deux mêmes se trouvant ensemble à la fin de la pièce, font un quatrain au lieu d'un tercet. On trouve encore des Villanelles dont les couplets sont de six vers."⁶ Not much is said in this text which was to be so momentous for the villanelle. A narrow reading of the rules might stipulate the exclusive use of elle and oi rhymes⁷. And Richelet allows

¹Helen Louise Cohen, Lyric Forms from France: Their History and Their Use (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922), p. 72.

²Boulmier, p. 9; Suberville, p. 223; Elwert, p. 176.

³L.E. Kastner, A History of French Versification (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 279.

⁴Elwert, p. 176.

⁵César Pierre Richelet, La Versification Française: ou l'art de bien faire et de bien tourner les Vers (Paris: Estienne Loyson, 1671).

⁶César Pierre Richelet, Dictionnaire de Rimes (Paris: Charles-Nicolas Poiron, 1751), p. LXI.

⁷Boulmier (p. 10) reports having seen such rules.

for six-line strophes, an allowance later poets have ignored. To account for the adoption of Passerat's villanelle as the exclusive model for the fixed-form type of villanelle, it is suggested that later prosodists were content to interpret as a prescription Richelet's brief description of Passerat's villanelle. Custom and repetition sanctioned such an interpretation, especially since the villanelle fell into disuse in the seventeenth century and prosodists lacked representative contemporary villanelles on which to regulate their theory.

Jean Passerat published only two villanelles¹, "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle", historically important for the villanelle form, and "Villanelle: Qui en sa fantaisie", the first of which is here presented accompanied by the Wyndham translation used by Cohen and presented side by side for ease of study:

J'ay perdu ma tourterelle:
Est-ce point d'elle que j'oy?
Je veus aller après elle.

I have lost my turtle-dove;
Is not that her call to me?
To be with her were enough.

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

You mourn for your mate in love,
I chant in the same sad key,
I have lost my turtle-dove.

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

If your faith is not to move,
Fast is my fidelity;
To be with her were enough.

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

Grief renews your song thereof,
Endless mine of misery;
I have lost my turtle-dove.

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

Seeing no more in the grove
Hers, no beauty can I see;
To be with her were enough.

Mort, que tant de fois j'appelle,
Pren ce qui se donne à toy:
J'ay perdu ma tourterelle,¹
Je veus aller après elle.

Death, besought all life above,
Take one self-assigned to thee!
I have lost my turtle-dove;²
To be with her were enough.

The essential characteristics of this villanelle as the model which

¹Boulmier, p. 7.

²Cohen, p. 73.

will be more or less closely imitated from the seventeenth century onwards are, its division into tercets written on two rhymes, the first and third line rhyming and recurring alternately as the concluding refrain to each tercet; the refrains recur together at the end of the poem making its last strophe a quatrain¹. The two refrain lines are thus central to the theme and structure of the poem.

The first, dominant refrain line is accurately translated, but not so the second or complementary refrain line (Line 3): "Je veus aller après elle", literally, "I want to go after her" does not mean "To be with her were enough". In the first tercet which expresses the theme of the poem, the notions of loss and search are complementary: the speaker has lost his turtle-dove and wishes to go after her. The translation does not express this causal relationship between the two refrain lines. The alternating notions of loss and search expressed in the concluding refrains of each tercet link the tercets and enhance the unity and development of the poem; not to convey these notions and their relationship is to modify the general meaning of the poem and to mistranslate it.

The second line, "Is not that her call to me?" links the two refrain lines by expressing the immediate motivation for seeking out the turtle-dove, the general motivation of loss being expressed in the first line. The choice of the turtle-dove is not haphazard; traditionally this bird has symbolized not only love, but fidelity in love, even to death².

Tercets two, three and four present an implied comparison between the respective love situation of the speaker and of the person addressed. Tercet two mentions their shared regret, the refrain giving the cause for

¹Elwert, p. 176.

²J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 334.

the speaker's regret. Their faith and loyalty are compared in tercet three, a faithfulness that prompts the speaker, as expressed in the refrain, to seek out his beloved. The translation of the refrain entirely misses the point of the tercet, and is both awkward and incorrect. The fourth tercet compares the love laments of speaker and person addressed, the two first lines being complementary: "Your lament is renewed/Mine must go on forever", the colon ending the second line indicating that the refrain is that lament. In the translation, "Grief renews your song thereof,/Endless mine of misery", "thereof" is an awkward expletive, and the "endless mine of misery" grammatically belongs to the person addressed rather than to the speaker, as in the original. Nor does the translation succeed in linking the refrain logically to the rest of the tercet.

The fifth tercet, by dwelling on the speaker's own feelings, leads the thought of the poem towards the darker theme of death. The original text of this tercet flows in a single thought: "Not seeing the beauty any more, /Nothing beautiful do I see: I must seek her." The translation introduces a gratuitous "grove", and by placing the caesura of the second line so close to its beginning, destroys the cadence of the tercet.

The climax of the poem is reached in the first two lines of the quatrain, following logically upon the speaker's renunciation of all beauty in the fourth tercet. Death, in the lines "Death whom I call so often,/Take that which gives itself to you:" changes the meaning of the refrain "Je veus aller après elle", since "aller" now takes on the meaning of 'to die', and "perdu" now suggests 'lost in death'. The colon

ending the second line indicates that the refrain expresses the reason why death is called upon by the speaker. The first and last lines of the translated quatrain convey none of this, the first line being almost unintelligible.

The rhymes of the translation are imperfect, the use of such imperfect rhymes having no apparent functional reason in the poem¹. The unity of the poem is based on the relationship between the two refrains and upon the gradual transition in the emotions expressed from perceived loss, through regret and renunciation to death, aspects of the poem not very well communicated by an awkward and heavy-handed translation. Apart from its historical function in providing a model for subsequent villanelles, Passerat's poem significantly illustrates the importance of the relationship between dominant and secondary refrains, the possibility of having invariable refrains express a variety of meaning by means of their association with respective stanzas, and the importance of having this variation appear as an integral part of the general development in tone and meaning of the poem.

To conclude this study of the history of the villanelle to the time of the French Renaissance, Passerat's other villanelle is presented to emphasize how different in content and structure his "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" villanelle is when compared not only with villanelles written by his contemporaries, but even with his only other work in the genre.

¹Cf. Theodore Roethke's use of imperfect rhyme as a functional element, below, p. 143.

Villanelle

Qui en sa fantaisie
 Loge la jalousie
 Bientost cocu sera
 Et ne s'en sauera.

Qu'on mette en vue une cage
 Cest oiseau sans plumage:
 Bientost cocu sera,
 Et ne s'en sauera.

A contempler sa mine
 Qu'une coiffe embeguine,
 Bientost cocu sera
 Et ne s'en sauera.

Son regard se rapporte
 Au tor qui cornes porte;
 Bientost cornu sera,
 Et ne s'en sauera.

Son front, qui bien retire
 A un cornu satyre,
 Bientost cornu sera,
 Et ne s'en sauera.¹

This poem has been called a "gauloiserie"², a bit of bawdiness, though what salacity there is in it seems no more scabrous than that observed in a villanelle from the supposedly more decorous nineteenth century³: It consists of a humorous description of the jealous man "Who soon will be a cuckold/And will never escape that condition. The poem is in quatrains, not the henceforth regular tercets, presenting a series of jests at the cuckold's expense. The strophes are loosely connected, the double line refrain exhibiting little change in meaning or in form, except for the substitution of "cornu" (horned) for "cocu" (cuckold or cuckolded) in the last two strophes. X

¹Boulmier, p. 11.

²Ibid, p. 12.

³See below, p. 27.

Section 2

Revival and Definition of the Villanelle in France

From the seventeenth century until the revival of the French fixed forms led by Théodore de Banville (1823-1891) towards the end of the nineteenth century, no examples of the fixed-form type of villanelle have been found in French literature, nor has any literary historian or prosodist consulted mentioned the composition of any such villanelles during this period. The reason for the apparent neglect of the form is perhaps to be found in Vauquelin de la Fresnaye's Art Poétique composed over a period of thirty years ending in 1605:

Et l'Ode et la Chanson peuvent tout librement
 Courir par le chemin d'un bel entendement.
 La chanson amoureuse affable et naturelle
 Sans sentir rien de l'Art, comme une villanelle,
 Marche parmy le peuple aux danses aux festins
 Et raconte aux carfours les gestes des mutins . . .
 Chantant en nos festins, ainsi les vau-de-vire,
 Qui sentent le bon temps nous font encore rire.¹

Just as French poets of the Renaissance had become hostile towards the artfulness and complexity of the old French forms, so poets of 'le grand siècle' of Louis XIV may have found the villanelle too superficial and complex, suggesting artfulness. The playfulness and delicacy of villanelles such as those that have been examined in this study might have seemed inappropriate to the style of a Corneille, a Racine or a Boileau, and would hardly have been used, except perhaps satirically, by the author of Les Précieuses Ridicules.

¹Patterson, I, p. 680.

However, periodical disuse or neglect of a poetic form is no criterion of its merit, and the rôle of Théodore de Banville has been paramount in awakening French literary opinion to the merit of the long-neglected French fixed forms, including the villanelle:

That . . . praise of the Middle French fixed forms is not exaggerated is proved by their successful revival in the late nineteenth century on both sides of the English channel and even on the American shore of the Atlantic. Théodore de Banville (1820-91) was the initiator of this renaissance. He had a constant and consuming desire to introduce unusual and intricate rime schemes once more into French poetry. He was a Parnassian, a devotee of form, of art for art's sake. In his quest for elaboration of versification, what could be more natural than a return to the native fixed forms of the ancestral past? Here was all the glamour of an indigenous tradition to be revived . . . In Banville's various volumes are to be found samples of the ballade, the chant royal, the villanelle, the rondeau and the triolet. He aroused others to imitation and emulation. He pointed the way with rule and precept in his Petit Traité (1871), one of the notable monuments in the history and theory of French versification in the nineteenth century.¹

In chapter IX of the Petit Traité², Banville presents the rules governing the old French fixed forms, together with one or more examples for each form. Banville begins with a definition:

"J'ai nommé poèmes traditionnels à forme fixe ceux 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."³ By this statement, Banville would seem to fall into the category of prosodists mentioned by Boulmier who, following Richelet, do not take into account

¹Patterson, I, p. 224.

²Théodore de Banville, Petit Traité de Poésie Française (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1909), pp. 189 - 216.

³Banville, p. 213.

forms of the villanelle other than those which conform to Passerat's model; excluded thus from the genre are not only the great majority of Renaissance villanelles, but the villanella. However, the definition might be accepted as a practical definition of the fixed-form type of villanelle for the poets of his time and circle. Even with respect to his own practice, "irrévocablement" is not absolute¹.

Banville further comments that these forms "ont la grâce naïve et comme inconsciente des créations qu'ont faites les époques primitives"². It is difficult to find anything rough or primitive about poetic forms representing the cultural fruition of centuries of literary development; this seems rather Banville's way of commending what he sees as a kind of old-fashioned quaintness. Such an attitude to the French fixed forms may lead more than one fin-de-siècle poet to cultivate quaintness as a form of authenticity,³ and at least with respect to the villanelle, will lead to its being considered a form of laborious trifle until poets in the twentieth century begin to perceive the capacity of the form for serious utterance.⁴

Banville presents the villanelle as having its proper niche in some little sea-side resort, "un petit Dunkerke", frequented by the poetic muse, where the villanelle will be "le plus ravissant de ses bijoux

¹See below, p. 27.

²Banville, p. 189.

³Banville, p. 213.

⁴Ibid, p. 213. See below p. 88 et seq.

d'étagère."¹. "Bijoux d'étagère" or display jewels exactly represents the quality that will afflict the reputation of the villanelle for the following half-century. He then presents as his only example of the form just such a "bijou d'étagère", "La Marquise Aurore" by Philoxène Boyer (1827-1867) a pretty evocation of the bergerette atmosphere of Marie-Antoinette's court at Versailles.

La Marquise Aurore.

Villanelle.

Près de Marie-Antoinette
Dans le petit Trianon,
Fûtes-vous pas bergerette?

Vous a-t-on conté fleurette
Aux bords du nouveau Lignon,
Près de Marie-Antoinette?

Des fleurs sur votre houlette
Un surnom sur votre nom
Fûtes-vous pas bergerette?

Etiez-vous noble soubrette,
Comme Iris avec Junon,
Près de Marie-Antoinette?

Pour déniaiser Ninette.
Pour idylliser Ninon,
Fûtes-vous pas bergerette?

Au pauvre comme au poêle,
Avez-vous jamais dit: Non,
Près de Marie-Antoinette?

O marquise sans aigrette,
Sans diamants, sans linon,
Fûtes-vous pas bergerette?

Ah! votre simple cornette
Aurait converti Zénon!
Près de Marie-Antoinette,
Fûtes-vous pas bergerette?²

¹Banville, p. 213.

²Loc. cit.

The prettiness of "La Marquise Aurore" is emphasized by the use of a rhyme in ette, with a consequent abundance of diminutives. Each strophe mentions some aspect of late eighteenth century French court pastoral life, with all the pretty artificiality of "Lignon", "Ninon", "Ninette", "Trianon" and the conventionally classic "Iris" and "Junon". But there is neither variation on a theme nor development of a central idea, and the organic unity is so tenuous that strophes might easily be transposed without significantly affecting the development of the poem. There is no very strong connection or subordination between the refrain lines other than a grammatical one: "Near Marie-Antoinette/Were you not a *bergerette*?"

In the rules which accompany this example¹, Banville specifies that the villanelle is written on two rhymes, one masculine, one feminine, the second refrain line or middle line of each tercet always being masculine. On the number of tercets in the poem, he shows himself less certain, merely stating that it seems that there is no set number of tercets. He concludes his discussion of the villanelle by comparing "La Marquise Aurore", "this sparkling little poem" to "a braid of gold and silver threads interwoven with a single rose thread."²

Of Banville's own use of the fixed form type of villanelle, little need be said, since he wrote only two such poems, "Villanelle des Pauvres Housseurs" and "Villanelle de Buloz"³, the less recondite of which is presented here:

¹Banville, p. 214. "La Marquise Aurore" has seven tercets.

²Ibid, p. 215.

³Théodore de Banville, *Poésies Complètes*, ed. Eugène Fasquelle Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1909), I, p.235, see Appendix, p. 189.

Villanelle
des Pauvres Housseurs

En avant, mes amis; sus au romantisme:
Voltaire et l'Ecole normale.
Figaro du 30 décembre 1858.

Un tout petit pamphlétaire
Voudrait se tenir debout
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.

Je vois sous ce mousquetaire,
Dont le manteau se découd,
Un tout petit pamphlétaire.

Renvoyez au Finistère
Le grain frelaté qu'il moud
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire

Il sera le mandataire
Du fameux Taine, et, par goût,
Un tout petit pamphlétaire.

Prud'homme universitaire,
Il a l'air d'un marabout
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.

Tirez, tirez-le par terre,
Car il a . . . pleuré partout
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.

Ah! le mauvais locataire!
Bah! l'on raille et l'on absout
Un tout petit pamphlétaire.

Bornons là ce commentaire;
Mais il a manqué . . . de tout
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.

Le célèbre phalanstère
Nous a donné pour ragoût
Un tout petit pamphlétaire.

Mons Purgon, vite un clystère!
Le pauvre homme écume et bout
Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.

Qui veut, dans son monastère,
 Jeter Pindare à l'égout?
 Un tout petit pamphlétaire.

De Ferrey jusqu'à Cythère,
 On rit de voir jusqu'au bout
 Un tout petit pamphlétaire
 Sur le fauteuil de Voltaire.¹

Banville's use of the villanelle is consistent with his opinion of it in the Petit Traité: "Villanelle des Pauvres Housseurs" is an exercise in witty virtuosity, sparked by a line in a newspaper article denouncing Romanticism and clamouring for Voltaire and the Ecole Normale, a line used by Banville as the epigraph to the poem. The title means "the poor upholsterers", though the word housseur is not current and seems to have been derived from the verb housser, to cover or protect with a slipcover. In a series of jests, the speaker makes fun of the pamphleteer who would presume to occupy Voltaire's chair, that is, to defend his views or literary opinions. There are a few lighthearted references to literary figures, a slight touch of the scabrous about what the pamphleteer is doing in Voltaire's chair, but the speaker does not seem to take the matter very seriously, the indignation is ironic and the prevailing tone one of ridicule.

Generally the refrains logically and grammatically conclude each stanza, though the connection of the refrain with the other lines in the fourth stanza seems forced. The refrains are mutually related by juxtaposition, "A very small-time pamphleteer/In Voltaire's chair", the effect being one of incongruity. However, each refrain serves only the strophe

¹Banville, p. 235.

in which it appears and shows little variation in meaning or overtone throughout the poem. Nor does the general theme of the poem seem to develop: the self-contained strophes follow one upon the other, each making its little jest and, excepting the first and last strophes, any of them might be transposed without it significantly affecting the poem. The poem consists of eleven such tercets and a quatrain, and because of the disconnected character of the poem, it has the effect of a series of barbs that ends when the speaker runs out of jests. This villanelle thus serves the useful purpose of illustrating the effect of extending the length of the poem beyond that of the Passerat model without some compensating element to lend unity to the poem. Still, in Banville's hands the villanelle lends itself well to this kind of play in what was clearly intended as vers de société, but the success of Banville's wit in this villanelle may not have been an unmixed blessing for the villanelle as a form suitable for other purposes.

Joseph Boulmier's Villanelles has been referred to in connection with the history of the villanelle¹. The rules he presents in this work for composing a villanelle deserve particular attention in this study not only because they are among the most complete, but also because Boulmier is the only critic and historian of the villanelle found to have attempted to theorize about the reasons for such rules.

Boulmier suggests the heptameter as best for the villanelle because such a line is light and lively². The villanelle is composed on

¹See above, p. 7.

²Boulmier, p. 13. However, the characteristics of metres vary from language to language, variously suiting the genius of each tongue.

two rhymes, one feminine, the other masculine, either being used to begin the poem, but whichever rhyme begins the poem thus suggests its tone and is called the dominant rhyme. The reason for limiting the length of the villanelle to five tercets and a quatrain is that to make it longer would make it too heavy. The dominant rhyme is to begin and end each tercet, with the non-dominant in the middle line. From the second tercet onwards, the first and third lines of the first tercet serve as alternating refrains; but each must recur so precisely and naturally that the other could not be substituted for it. The reason given for this rule is that the first and third lines of the first tercet express the sentiment or idea from which the entire poem is developed and these lines are placed at the end of the final quatrain as a brief résumé of the poem. Boulmier concludes this part of his discussion with a technical model of his own composition:

Pour faire une Villanelle.

Pour faire une villanelle,
Rime en "elle" et rime en "in",
La méthode est simple et belle.

On dispose en kyrielle
Cinq tercets, plus un quatrain,
Pour faire une villanelle.

Sur le premier vers en "elle"
Le second tercet prend fin;
La méthode est simple et belle.

Le troisième vers, fidèle,
Alterne comme refrain
Pour faire une villanelle.

La ronde ainsi s'entremêle;
L'un, puis l'autre, va son train:
La méthode est simple et belle.

La dernière ritournelle
 Les voit se donner la main:
 Pour faire une villanelle
 La méthode est simple et belle.¹

In theory and in practice, Boulmier closely adheres to the Passerat model. Of particular note in his theory is his insistence on the complementary nature of the refrains which should logically conclude each tercet and which should not be so uniform or simple as to be easily substituted one for the other. He recognizes the difficulty of doing this² and the refrains in his technical model conform to his theory by being complementary, "To make a villanelle/The method is simple and fine", and related to their respective tercets either grammatically or by suitable punctuation.

When Boulmier comes to discuss what he calls "style", a term here corresponding to the English word tone, he emphasizes "du tendre et du naif"³, tenderness and artlessness, suggesting as suitable topics for the villanelle sweet memories, the mirages of the heart, "les enfantillages de l'amour", the child-like playfulness of love. He concedes that serious matters may occasionally be treated, but warns against banal sonorousness, pretentious prettiness or mere word-play.

Of the villanelles in Boulmier's collection Les Villanelles⁴, the first seems particularly suitable for analysis in this study, since it

¹Boulmier, p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴See Appendix, pp. 190, 191.

is a poem in praise of Jean Passerat and of his villanelle:

A Jean Passerat

Vieille, elle est toujours nouvelle:
Non, jamais ne passera,
Passerat, ta villanelle.

"J'ai perdu ma tourterelle . . ."
Cette chanson restera:
Vieille, elle est toujours nouvelle.

"Je veux aller après elle . . ."
Oui: mais qui donc l'atteindra,
Passerat, ta villanelle?

Sous son humble ritournelle
Un vrai sentiment vibra:
Vieille, elle est toujours nouvelle.

Couvant sa plaie immortelle,
Tout coeur blessé redira,
Passerat, ta villanelle.

A surpasser ce modèle
Nul effort ne parviendra:
Vieille, elle est toujours nouvelle,
Passerat, ta villanelle.¹

From Passerat's famous villanelle², Boulmier has taken one of the rhymes and the two refrains which he quotes, and this in itself is a delicate tribute to Passerat. As in all his villanelles, Boulmier is careful to relate the refrains of his poem: "Old, but always new/Is, Passerat, your villanelle".

The refrains express, in the opening tercet, the compliment which is the theme of the poem, the rest of the poem describing how the compliment is true. The second tercet recalls the first line of Passerat's "J'ay

¹Boulmier, p. 26.

²See above, p. 17.

perdu ma tourterelle" and the third tercet begins with the second refrain line of Passerat's poem, but the speaker turns the line into a compliment by having "elle" refer to the villanelle rather than to the "tourterelle", thus suggesting the incomparable quality of Passerat's villanelle. The third and fourth tercets comment upon the perennial lover's sorrow which was the subject of Passerat's villanelle and which ensures its immortality in any wounded heart. The quatrain concludes the poem by praising Passerat's villanelle as unsurpassable, thus leading to the refrains expressing the theme of the poem.

This poem illustrates the chief rule emphasized by Boulmier: complementary refrains closely and logically linked to their respective strophes, variation in tone and meaning of the refrains throughout the poem, and the development of a central theme culminating in the quatrain.

L.E. Kastner's definition of the villanelle closely follows that of Banville, excepting the rule about length which, for Kastner, is a maximum of six strophes, "the number used by Passerat, who was the first and remains the best writer of such a trifle"¹. Kastner published this comment in 1903, and his opinion of the villanelle as a "trifle" is not at variance with the theory or practice of the period. Excepting Boulmier's verse, Kastner concludes that "No very serious attempt has been made to revive this species of poetic composition"². He notes a slight difference in form between Boyer's "La Marquise Aurore"³ and Passerat's

¹Kastner, p. 280.

²Loc. cit.

³See above, p. 25.

"J'ay perdu ma tourterelle"¹: "the third line of the first tercet (in Boyer) is repeated before the first line"². An examination of both poems reveals no such discrepancy, their refrain pattern being identical. Since the refrain in "La Marquise Aurore" has a generally tenuous link with the other lines of the tercet, the danger of a misprint in the course of seven tercets becomes all the greater.

Kastner mentions Banville, Maurice Rollinat (1846-1903) and Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894) as writers of villanelles. He notes that all of Rollinat's villanelles have at least ten tercets, and some as many as twenty,³ but although he specifies five tercets as the proper number, he does not comment on Rollinat's practice. He identifies Leconte de Lisle as "the only French poet to have applied the villanelle to serious subjects"⁴, citing Leconte de Lisle's "Le Temps, l'Etendue et le Nombre"⁵ as an example of serious use written in tercets of eight syllables, but not commenting on this departure from the rules.

Jean de Suberville agrees with Banville and Boulmier on most points, but prescribes an uneven number of tercets and a rapid rhythm for the villanelle⁶. He notes that the rules he presents are based on Passerat's villanelle, but that the villanelle exists according to rules less strict both before and after Passerat, citing Du Bellay and Edmond Rostand (1868-

¹See above, p. 17.

²Kastner, loc. cit.

³See Appendix, p. 192 for one of Rollinat's villanelles; the characteristics they present which would be of interest for this study are sufficiently illustrated by poems analysed in the study.

⁴Kastner, p. 281.

⁵Discussed below, p. 37.

⁶Suberville, p. 223.

1918) in his play Chanteclerc (1910). Although Suberville recommends the use of heptameters and prescribes an initial feminine rhyme, he chooses to present as his only example of a villanelle part of a scene from a play written in octosyllabic verse, with an initial masculine rhyme. He concludes his discussion of the villanelle by mentioning the rules for the double villanelle, written in sestets instead of tercets, and with a concluding octave instead of a quatrain¹.

Edmond Rostand's villanelle from Chanteclerc deserves examination chiefly for two reasons: it is the only villanelle discovered forming part of a play and consisting of a dialogue, and it affords an example of the use of the villanelle for both witty and dramatic effect:

(Un crapaud à un autre crapaud:)

- Viens baver!

(Chanteclerc, au rossignol:)

- Mais ils vont gêner ton chant suave?

(Le rossignol, fièrement:)

- Non! Je prend leur refrain dans ma chanson et . . .

(Le gros crapaud caressant le tête d'un petit:)

Bave!

(Le rossignol et les crapauds alternant:)

- C'est nous qui sommes les crapauds!
- Et j'en fais une villanelle!
- Nous crevons dans nos vieilles peaux!

- Et moi, je chante sans repos
Tout en laissant prendre mon aile!
- C'est nous qui sommes les crapauds!

- Je chante! Car les ciels trop beaux,
Le soir, qui tient dans la venelle . . .
- Nous crevons dans nos vieilles peaux!

¹Cf. below, p. 56 , for another version of the double villanelle.

- De trop voluptueux propos;
L'air qui sent trop la pimprenelle . . .
- C'est nous qui sommes les crapauds!

- L'amour trop sûr de ses appeaux,
Force mon âme trop charnelle . . .
- Nous crevons dans nos vieilles peaux!

- A livrer les secrets dépôts
Qu'un dieu terrible a mis en elle!
- C'est nous qui sommes les crapauds!

- J'ai dans mon coeur tous les sanglots,
Tous les pays dans ma prunelle . . .
- Nous crevons dans nos vieilles peaux!

- Je vis, je meurs à tout propos;
Je suis la Chanson Eternelle!
- C'est nous qui sommes les crapauds!
- Nous crevons dans nos vieilles peaux! . . . ¹

In this last act of a dramatized animal fable, Rostand alternates the croaking of toads representing envious critics, with the song of the nightingale, representing an ingenuous poet, "the eternal duet of conflict in this world between Good and Evil"², but there is more of comedy than philosophy in this passage. This formally correct villanelle has little of the content we have come to associate with the genre. The toads simply repeat "We are the toads" and "We perish in our old skins", and the relationship between the two refrains as sung by this chorus seems limited to the fact of their being sung by the toads. They keep on repeating this simple burden showing concern only for their identity and perishing, regardless of the wide-ranging song of the selfless nightingale. This contrast between the critics and the poet provides the central dynamic relationship in the poem.

¹Edmond Rostand, Chanteclerc (Paris: Librairie Pierre Lafitte, 1910), p. 244.

²Suberville, p. 223.

The song of the nightingale runs the gamut of traditional romantic subjects, song, nature, love, the secrets of the soul, heartbreak, life and death, and always, at the end of the strophe, the simplistic croak of the toads. But there is a touch of satire in the nightingale's song: the use of the elle rhyme associated with the villanelle, especially in such terms as "venelle" and "pimprenelle" with their overtones of quaintness, and especially in the fourth tercet in which "utterances too voluptuous" and "too strong an odour of pimperl" suggest a criticism of preciosity. But this villanelle does demonstrate how the genre may be used within the context of a more inclusive genre, that the double refrain can be effective dramatically, and that dialogue can effectively take the place of a dominance-oriented relationship between the refrains.

The last French villanelle to be examined has considerable importance for the development of the villanelle, since it is the first villanelle encountered which deals seriously with matter of some gravity, its author, Leconte de Lisle, having been referred to as the only French poet to apply the villanelle to serious subjects:¹

Villanelle

Une nuit noire, par un calme, sous l'Equateur.

Le Temps, l'Etendue et le Nombre
Sont tombés du noir firmament
Dans la mer immobile et sombre.

Suaire de silence et d'ombre,
La nuit efface absolument
Le Temps, l'Etendue et le Nombre.

¹Kastner, p. 281.

Tel qu'un lourd et muet décombre,
L'Esprit plonge au vide dormant,
Dans la mer immobile et sombre.

En lui-même, avec lui, tout sombre,
Souvenir, rêve, sentiment,
Le Temps, l'Etendue et le Nombre,
Dans la mer immobile et sombre.¹

The poem conforms with Banville's rules, excepting that it has only three tercets instead of the usual five. In theme, tone and feeling the poem differs greatly from those of Banville, Boulmier or Rollinat, and seems rather to echo the poems of the great romantics, Lamartine, Musset, Châteaubriand and, especially, the Hugo of "Oceano Nox"², in the images of vast sea darkness swallowing all. The light, tripping quality of the other villanelles examined is totally absent here. Long vowels, liquid consonants and the rich, recurring rhyme in ombre -- the very word means shadow -- lend a majestic pace to the poem. The diction is consistently suggestive of darkness and depth, these elements compensating for the brevity of the poem as a villanelle. The refrain is strongly suggestive of the theme of the poem, the dark ocean engulfing time, space and number. Notable is the poet's use of "Etendue" rather than 'espace' for space, the former suggesting the horizontal space associated with a seascape, whereas 'espace' is more often associated with the vertical space of air.

¹Charles Marie Leconte de Lisle, Poèmes Tragiques (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Lemerre, 1884), p. 40.

²Victor Hugo, Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo (Paris: Editions Rencontre, 1968), p. 401.

The pace of the poem is absolutely steady, and if the sense of each line is respected, cannot be read at an inconstant speed. This, together with the pealing, solemn refrains, suggests the movement-within-immobility of a quiet, dark sea, which in turn complements the theme of the sea inevitably engulfing all. It is to be noted that, as part of the unbroken movement of the poem, the refrains form an integral part of their respective strophes, recurring logically as part of a sentence, without the slightest possibility of transposition.

Few villanelles, in French or in English, have achieved the effect of music, power and concentration observed in this poem. The shortness of its form constitutes a precedent for what, by analogy with the sonnet, might be called a "curtal"¹ villanelle.

The history of the villanelle in France may be summarized as follows. In the fourteenth century there existed in France a type of irregular virelai possessing many of the formal characteristics of what was later to emerge as the fixed-form type of villanelle. The mediaeval French forms having become neglected with the onset of the Renaissance, French poets took to writing love poems in imitation of the Italian villanella. In the seventeenth century, Pierre Richelet selected one of these poems by Jean Passerat as an example of the villanelle form, an example which through the influence of subsequent prosodists became the model for the fixed-form type of villanelle. The villanelle fell into

¹C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1972), p. 144. In a curtal sonnet, the octave is shortened to a sestet, the sestet to a quatrain.

disuse from the seventeenth century until it was revived by Banville in the late nineteenth century, when it was used generally as a vers de société and for less serious subject matter, the notable exception in this respect being Leconte de Lisle's "Le Temps, l'Etendue et le Nombre".

CHAPTER II

THE VILLANELLE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE:

THE INTRODUCTORY PERIOD

The revival of the French fixed forms in France by Banville did not go unnoticed in England. The study of the villanelle in English literature must begin with an examination of the work of Edmund Gosse (1849-1928) since no evidence has been found to suppose a significant interest in the villanelle existing prior to his efforts to introduce the form into English literature. In a letter to Helen Louise Cohen chiefly concerned with the introduction of the ballade, Edmund Gosse remarked:

The reason for the simultaneous adoption of this beautiful form (the ballade) by a number of poets is difficult to trace. But I think it was connected with the circulation in London of certain copies of Banville's Trente-six Ballades Joyeuses (1873). This was certainly the case with Swinburne, Lang and myself, and I believe with Dobson and Henley. But a desire for the support of a more rigid and disciplined meter was in the air, and we all independently and simultaneously seized upon the French forms of which Banville gave the precise rules in his Petit Traité. I cannot find the book, but I believe that a new edition was issued in 1876. I know that I wrote at that time a letter of adoring enquiry, and received in return a long letter of sympathy and advice from Théodore de Banville. But do not suppose that any of this interest in the "forms" as we used to call them, dates back earlier than 1870 in England.²

It is not within the ambit of this thesis to describe Gosse's influence in promoting the revival of the French fixed forms, since to do so would

¹Patterson (I, p. 225) notes the parallel between the influence exercised by Banville and his school on certain of their English contemporaries and the relationship of Chaucer, Hoccleve and Lydgate to Machaut and Deschamps in the fourteenth century.

²Cohen, p. 82.

be simply to repeat the research conducted in this respect by scholars tracing the development in English of other fixed forms such as the triolet and the rondeau¹.

For the villanelle, the introductory period in English literature may be considered to span the literary career of Gosse, its earliest promoter, from 1877, the year Gosse published "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse"², to 1928. The villanelles of the most notable practitioners of the form in its inception were published during this period and, with one notable exception, have characteristics in common which suggest the validity of thus grouping them.

In addition to Gosse's theory and practice, the villanelles of six other poets of this period will be discussed: Austin Dobson (1840-1921), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Ernest Henley (1849-1903), Andrew Lang (1844-1912), Ernest Dowson (1867-1900), and John Davidson (1857-1909). This list is not in random order but reflects a certain polarity between what may be considered the traditional view of the villanelle for light, even humorous matter, and a new tradition first perceptible in the villanelles of Leconte de Lisle. The first four poets mentioned above

¹Paul J. Marcotte, "An Introduction to the Triolet," Inscape, 5, No. 2 (Autumn, 1966), 19-23, and "A Victorian Trio of Triolet Turners," Inscape, 6, No. 1 (Winter, 1968), 1-14. Lorraine F. McMullen, "The Importance of Algernon Charles Swinburne to the Origin of the Roundel and His Use of This Form," Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, Ottawa, Ont.: University of Ottawa, 1967. Frank Martin Tierney, "The Revival of the Rondeau in England in the Years Following 1860, and the Leadership of Sir Edmund Gosse in this Revival," Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ottawa, Ont.: University of Ottawa, 1969.

²Discussed below, p. 43.

and Gosse seem to exemplify the tradition derived from Banville¹; Dowson and Davidson announce a new seriousness, and also by their treatment of the form as such foreshadow the evolution and development of the villanelle.

Edmund Gosse's manifesto of 1877, entitled "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" is generally considered to be the most influential statement regarding the introduction of the French fixed forms into English literature². In this article, the discussion of the villanelle is relatively brief and closely reflects the prosodic theory of Banville:

The Villanelle has been called "the most ravishing jewel worn by the Muse Erato." It is unusual, as befits a precious thing, since its construction is so difficult and its nature so delicate that it requires a peculiar mood and moment for its composition. I do not find that much has been recorded of its history, but it dates back at least as far as the fifteenth century. It is a poem written in tercets and on two rhymes, the first and third verse of the first stanza continuing to alternate as the third line of each successive stanza until they finally form the close as a couplet It appears that villanelles may be of any length, if only they retain this number and arrangement of rhymes.³

The quotation in this passage is a paraphrase of Banville's opening comments on the villanelle⁴, and the description of the villanelle as "a precious thing" further echoes Banville's remarks. What Gosse means by "delicate nature" and "peculiar mood and moment" may best be seen by

¹See above, p. 24 . In this connection, Patterson (I, 226) notes "the quaint and picturesque attraction of the Middle French fixed forms in modern English verse".

²Frank M. Tierney, "Sir Edmund Gosse and the Revival of the French Fixed Forms in the Age of Transition." Literature in Transition: 1880-1920, 14, No. 3 (1971), 191-199.

³Edmund William Gosse, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse," Cornhill Magazine, 26, No. 211 (July 1877), 64-65.

⁴See above, p. 24.

examining his own practice and analysis of the villanelle. He presents Jean Passerat's "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" as "An example"¹, the indefinite article "An" suggesting that perhaps Gosse was aware of other Renaissance villanelles. With Banville, he allows any number of tercets to the villanelle, which implies that neither author was concerned with imposing a strict conformity with the Passerat model. Gosse makes no mention of the historical importance of Passerat's villanelle, his only comment being to note that "such a pretty grief is worthily enshrined in such a dainty form"², thus suggesting that, like Banville, he sees the villanelle chiefly as a vehicle for precious sentiment. He mentions only Banville and Boyer as having published villanelles in modern France, which may suggest that he had read only the villanelles in Banville's Petit Traité or did not wish to mention others he had read³. Gosse concludes his remarks on the villanelle with the opinion that a villanelle by him published in the Athenæum in 1874 had been the only villanelle to have been published in English⁴, an opinion supported by the research in this study.

The only other reference to the villanelle in "A Plea" is to be found in its closing paragraph and constitutes some of the best advice regarding the use of the form:

¹Gosse, p. 64.

²Ibid., p. 65.

³Boulmier's Villanelles (1878) was published one year after the appearance of Gosse's "A Plea".

⁴Banville, loc. cit.

. . . But there is always the danger of using elaborate and beautiful measures to conceal poverty of thought, and my plea would be incomplete if I left this objection to it unstated. The only excuse for writing rondeaux and villanelles is the production of poems that are charming to a reader who takes no note of their elaborate form; they should be attractive in spite of, and not because of, their difficulty. The true test of success is that the poem should give the reader an impression of spontaneity and ease, and that attention should be attracted by the wit, or fancy, or pathos, in the thoughts and expression, and not until later study, by the form at all.¹

The association of the villanelle with what is "charming" should again be noted. If Gosse's theory closely follows that of Banville, perhaps his practice may suggest some difference of approach, not only from that of Banville but also from that of Passerat. The following is the example he gives for the villanelle in the "Plea", a poem of his own composition:

A Plea

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.

¹Gosse, p. 71.

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 hath 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 hath passed by.¹

In this villanelle, Gosse departs from the Passerat model in a number of ways. The poem has seven tercets instead of Passerat's five; and both refrains are modified, the first, "Wouldst thou not be content to die" (the question mark being implied, but appearing only in line three) becoming "Shalt pray in vain for leave to die" (Line 24), and the second refrain line, "And golden Autumn passes by" (Line 3), being modified, punctuation excepted, to "When golden Autumn hath passed by" in stanzas seven and eight. The changes in the second refrain line do not seem to affect its refrain quality to any great degree, since "When" could have been used in the place of "And" throughout the poem, and the verb involved remains 'pass', only its tense changing from "passes" to "hath passed". The modification in the first refrain line is more serious in its effect, eliminating the traditional combination of the two refrains to express the theme and conclude the poem. "Shalt pray in vain for leave to die" (Line 24) may well reflect the cruelty of winter, but after the evolving of natural images reflecting autumn changing into winter, represents with the preceding line, "While life her wasted hands is wringing", a sudden shift

¹Gosse, p. 65.

in meaning and the introduction of a third personification, "life" not mentioned in the rest of the poem. "Lest" in line nineteen introduced subordinate clauses constituting stanzas seven and eight, the entire sentence never being completed by a principal clause. This grammatical licence together with the accumulation of images in stanzas seven and eight combine to lend to the conclusion of the poem a certain impression of confusion, as though the poet had to have recourse to new material to bring the poem to a close. The comments of Boulmier regarding the length of the villanelle, and the example of Banville come to mind, suggesting that to go beyond Passerat's five tercets in a form with two refrains is to risk the impression of mere accumulation or to exhaust the capacity of the refrains for significant expression.

Gosse's licence in this poem is no very different in effect from that which he censures in "A Plea", where departure from the rules is seen as "an example of that vague 'poetical licence' which incompetent workmen are so fond of falling back upon and which in reality does not exist"¹.

The reason for the failure in the last stanza stems in part from the relationship between the two refrains. One is a question, the other a subordinate phrase; until "When" is substituted for "And", the two cannot form a coherent grammatical unit, and there is little of the paradox, consequence or antithesis characteristic of a more meaningful use of the refrain in the villanelle. At least the order of images in the poem is

¹Gosse, p. 70.

such that it could not easily be changed, and the darkening atmosphere of the poem is consistently maintained, at least until the last stanza, to reflect "a peculiar mood and moment"¹.

Gosse's comment about Passerat's poem, "This dear dove of Passerat's seems to me quite as sweet as Lesbia's² sparrow . . . ³ may have been the initial impetus for his own sparrow poem. In the following villanelle, Gosse has the bird itself express its farewell to its mistress:

Villanelle

Little mistress mine, good-bye!
I have been your sparrow true;
Dig my grave, for I must die.

Waste no tear and heave no sigh;
Life should still be blithe for you,
Little mistress mine, good-bye!

In your garden let me lie,
Underneath the pointed yew
Dig my grave for I must die.

We have loved the quiet sky
With its tender arch of blue;
Little mistress mine, good-bye!

That I still may feel you nigh,
In your virgin bosom, too,
Dig my grave for I must die.

Let our garden friends that fly
Be the mourners, fit and few.
Little mistress mine, good-bye!
Dig my grave, for I must die.⁴

¹See above, p. 43.

²A reference to Catullus' two poems on his mistress Lesbia's sparrow, The Poems of Catullus, trans. Peter Whigham (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966), pp. 51, 52. Catullus's two sparrow poems are not really elegies or threnodies, for the first expresses the poet's envy of the bird's being fondled by Lesbia, and the second remarks

The villanelle is perfectly regular, and the two refrains are complementary; the middle four stanzas do not form any strictly organic sequence and could be transposed without signally affecting the poem. The theme is charmingly sad, echoing the wistful sentiments characteristic of the poets of the Nineties, the evanescence of life, resignation to death, all with touches of tenderness and sensuality. Even in so delicate a poem, to which Gosse's terms of "dainty", "pathetic" and "charm" so evidently apply, the proper choice and treatment of the two refrains of a villanelle are to be seen, notably in the last stanza, where the refrains aptly summarize the meaning of the whole poem in a single coherent statement.

The 'carpe diem' and 'carpe florem' themes characteristic of this period are to be found in most of the villanelles of Austin Dobson. The delicacy and charm associated with the villanelle by Banville and Gosse may clearly be seen in this villanelle by Dobson:

When I Saw You Last, Rose

Villanelle

When I saw you last, Rose,
You were only so high; --
How fast the time goes!

Like a bud ere it blows,
You just peeped at the sky,
When I saw you last, Rose!

Now your petals unclose,
Now your May-time is nigh; --
How fast the time goes!

on Lesbia's attachment for the bird.

³Gosse, p. 65.

⁴Edmund William Gosse, The Collected Poems of Edmund Gosse (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1911), p. 117.

And a life, -- how it grows!
 You were scarcely so shy,
 When I saw you last, Rose!

In your bosom it shows
 There's a guest on the sly;
 (How fast the time goes!)

Is it Cupid? Who knows!
 Yet you used not to sigh,
 When I saw you last, Rose!
 How fast the time goes!¹

Throughout the first four stanzas, the notion of the passage of time is linked with that of the child becoming a young girl. The association of flower and Rose with the arrival of May ends on a slightly teasing note which introduces the theme of love. Here, the touch of sensuality relating the first line of stanza four with the first line of stanza five keeps the teasing from being too coy. The last two stanzas more clearly emphasize the love element, and the ironical use of parenthesis and a rhetorical question maintain a certain sprightliness of tone to the end of the poem.

The unity and organic development characteristic of a successful villanelle may be seen in the structure of this one. What starts out as a mere comment grows into a more suggestive statement. Linking the fifth and sixth stanzas helps this unity, and although Dobson uses grammatically unconnected refrains, he shows skill in bringing them together in the last quatrain by logically linking the first with the second line of the quatrain: "Yet you used not to sigh,/When I saw you last, Rose!",

¹Austin Dobson, Complete Poetical Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 337.

intensifying thus the exclamation of "How fast the time goes!" In technique and subject, then, the poem is very much the jewel prescribed by Banville and Gosse.

Literary or historical allusion has often been used in the short lyric to capture "a peculiar mood and moment". Just as Boyer used a reference to the Versailles of Marie-Antoinette¹, so Dobson makes similar use of allusion to Romeo and Juliet in the following villanelle written in 1902:

'A Voice In The Scented Night'

(Villanelle at Verona)

A voice in the scented night, --
A step where the rose-trees blow, --
O Love, and O Love's delight!

Cold star at the blue vault's height,
What is it that shakes you so?
A voice in the scented night!

She comes in her beauty bright, --
She comes in her young love's glow, --
O Love, and O Love's delight!

She bends from her casement white,
And she hears it, hushed and low,
A voice in the scented night.

And he climbs by that stairway slight, --
Her passionate Romeo: --
O Love, and O Love's delight!

For it stirs us still in spite
Of its 'ever so long ago,'
That voice in the scented night, --
O Love, and O Love's delight!²

¹See above, p. 25.

²Dobson, p. 339.

The sub-title "(Villanelle at Verona)" gives the occasion of the poem; it is an evocation of a scene from Shakespeare's play¹ and it is this allusion which provides the unifying element of the poem. The one initially unrelated element in the first two lines of the second stanza echoes the star and moon imagery of the scene. However, the unity of the poem so simply based upon the scene may not compel the admiration deserved by "When I Saw You Last, Rose". The evocative first refrain line and the exclamatory second refrain line are epithetic, and although each is logically linked as the conclusion to respective tercets, neither affords much possibility of a development in sense. The chief weakness of the poem may be the relationship of the quatrain to the rest of the poem, since it stands somewhat apart from the poem, reminding the reader, not of the scene but of his feelings about the scene, to which it lends a faintly nostalgic, almost sentimental touch by the use of the expression (and the inverted commas) of "'ever so long ago'". The concluding refrain seems almost anti-climatic: wanting to remind us of the mood of the scene, by his interruption the poet breaks it.

Dobson provides a good example of another type of allusion much cultivated at this time, in which some classical poet is praised together with his vanished age. Theocritus, the Greek bucolic poet, often furnishes the subject of such verse. The third and last of Dobson's villanelles to be considered refers to Theocritus, and will prove useful in leading to the study of Wilde and Lang:

¹William Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet", II, ii, *The Complete Works*, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948), pp. 484-486.

For A Copy Of Theocritus

O singer of the field and fold,
Theocritus! Pan's pipe was thine, --
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

For thee the scent of new-turned mould,
The bee-hives, and the murmuring pine,
O Singer of the field and fold!

Thou sang'st the simple feasts of old, --
The beechen bowl made glad with wine . . .
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

Thou bad'st the rustic loves be told, --
Thou bad'st the tuneful reeds combine,
O Singer of the field and fold!

And round thee, ever-laughing, rolled
The blithe and blue Sicilian brine:
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

Alas for us! Our songs are cold;
Our Northern suns too sadly shine: --
O Singer of the field and fold,
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.¹

The first stanza sums up the two complementary themes of the poem: Theocritus had Pan's pipe, i.e. was able to sing of all the aspects of rustic nature symbolized by the god Pan, and Theocritus's Age of Gold is gone. The alternating refrains of the middle stanzas echo these themes throughout a catalogue of theocritan elements. As in the preceding villanelle, the last stanza is somewhat separate from the body of the poem, its first two lines interjecting the notion of regret that the English clime is inimical to such poetry, and the two refrains repeat the major themes, with the second refrain inferring that a quality of this utopia was to be in a clime where such poetry is possible.

¹Dobson, p. 404.

With respect to structure, this poem satisfies the requirements of the form, but there is little in the way of originality in its use of the refrain, and since the middle stanzas might be transposed without significant effect, the organic unity of the poem seems weak. Of the three villanelles examined, this belletristic exercise may not be the best, but it is not the least characteristic of Dobson's work in this form. Such villanelles as "On a Nankin Plate", "When This Old World Was New" and "Tu Ne Quaesieris" similarly present this delicate mixture of charm, wit and nostalgia¹.

The belletristic theme associated with Theocritus is again encountered in the villanelles of Oscar Wilde. The following villanelle is simply an evocation of a collection of topics or themes treated in the idylls of Theocritus. There is a noticeable affinity of the poets of this period for the Alexandrian school which produced poetry in many respects so similar to their own, learned, witty, nostalgic and perhaps a trifle self-conscious². For readers bred in the classics, the allusions in these poems might have had significant meaning, but in this typical poem by Wilde, there is little in the refrains to help link the elements except the Sicilian setting and the address to Theocritus as "Singer of Persephone".

¹See Appendix, pp. 193-195.

²Moses Hadas, Ancilla to Classical Reading (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 293 et seq.

Theocritus

O Singer of Persephone!

In the dim meadows desolate,
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still through the ivy flits the bee
Where Amaryllis lies in state,
O Singer of Persephone!

Simaetha calls on Hecate,
And hears the wild dogs at the gate;
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still by the light and laughing sea
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate,
O Singer of Persephone!

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

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee;
For thee the jocund shepherds wait,
O Singer of Persephone!
Dost thou remember Sicily?¹

In "Theocritus", the second refrain is used for tercets in which more dramatic figures are evoked, Hecate in tercet three, Daphnis in tercet five, whereas the first refrain evokes subjects whose fate is of greater import than their association with Sicily, Amaryllis in tercet two or Polypheme in tercet four. The unifying element of the poem stems from Theocritus' having written chiefly about Sicily, though much of his career was spent in Alexandria. The poem may thus be seen to be a projection of Theocritus' longing imagined by Wilde, and although there is little or no development of the theme in the poem, it does end with a quatrain mentioning the welcome that awaits Theocritus in Sicily. This is as far as the poem

¹Oscar Wilde, The Works of Oscar Wilde (London: Spring Books, 1963), p. 657.

goes towards providing a climax, and when the two refrains recur together at the end of the poem, they represent a re-statement of the chief idea of the poem, the association of Theocritus the poet with Sicily, "O Singer of Persephone", and his presumed longing for the island, "Dost thou remember Sicily?". From the mere statement of a series of classical allusions an impression is received of the poem as being something of an exercise in verse on a classical theme.

To some degree, a similar impression is made by Wilde's other attempt in the villanelle form, his "double villanelle, "Pan", the two parts of which are given side by side for ease of comparison:

Pan

double villanelle

One

O goat-foot God of Arcady!
This modern world is grey and old,
And what remains to us of thee?

No more the shepherd lads in glee
Throw apples at thy wattled fold,
O goat-foot God of Arcady!

Nor through the laurels can one see
Thy soft brown limbs, thy beard of gold,
And what remains to us of thee?

And dull and dead our Thames would be,
For here the winds are chill and cold,
O goat-foot God of Arcady!

Then keep the tomb of Helice,
Thine olive-woods, thy vine-clad wold,
And what remains to us of thee?

Two

Ah, leave the hills of Arcady,
Thy satyrs and their wanton play,
This modern world hath need of thee.

No nymph or Faun indeed have we,
For Faun and nymph are old and grey,
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady!

This is the land where liberty
Lit grave-browed Milton on his way,
This modern world hath need of thee!

A land of ancient chivalry
Where gentle Sidney saw the day,
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady.

This fierce sea-lion of the sea,
This England lacks some stronger lay,
This modern world hath need of thee!

Though many an unsung elegy
 Sleeps in the reeds our rivers hold,
 O goat-foot God of Arcady!
 Ah, what remains to us of thee?

Then blow some trumpet loud and free,
 And give thine oaten pipe away,
 Ah, leave the hills of Arcady!
 This modern world hath need of thee!¹

Jean de Suberville has noted the existence of a double villanelle consisting of five sestets and an octave². For Wilde, a double villanelle consists of two villanelles complementary in theme and having one rhyme in common. The classical allusions and the note of regret already seen in Dobson³ are found throughout both parts of this poem, but the development of the poem seems uncertain and at times unclear.

In part One, the first refrain is merely an epithet without explicit connection with the second refrain. The second refrain asks what elements remain of everything associated with the god Pan, but the fourth stanza suggests that Pan has never been to Britain and would find the climate uncongenial. Therefore, the fifth stanza suggests, Pan should stay where he is, but the last stanza still expresses regret, and the meaning of the concluding refrain, because of the change in the first word from a conjunction to an exclamation, is a further utterance of regret. But the change has a more important purpose. The interrogation of the last line, rhetorical or not, is answered by the second part of the poem. The great weakness of part One of this poem stems from the refrain "O goat-foot God of Arcady", which is colourful enough, but as an isolated epithet of somewhat recondite nature, cannot easily be linked with the

¹Wilde, p. 703.

²See above, p. 35.

³See above, p. 53.

other elements of the poem. By this choice of refrain, Wilde is sacrificing one of the more important poetic resources of the form.

This mistake is not made in part Two, where the refrains are complementary, clearly expressing the theme and purpose of the poem. Although the middle stanzas vary in content, the concluding stanza fosters the unity of the poem by repeating its main themes in a conclusive way. The middle stanzas of this part also contrast with those of the first part by emphasizing the English milieu rather than classical imagery, and some contrast is suggested by the faun and nymph that are old and grey echoing the modern world which is grey and old in Part One. Stanza three echoes Wordsworth's "London 1802"¹, and the Arcady of the fourth stanza evokes Sidney's The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia², but what might have been intended as a climax to this praise of England in the fifth stanza rather departs from the literary theme and is spoiled by its first line and a tenuous unity based on the thrice repeated "This". It is doubtful whether Wilde had a clear notion of what a sea-lion really is, regardless of how well the name sounds in poetry.

Cohen quotes from a review of Pater's Appreciations, by Wilde, which expresses Wilde's attitude to the French forms, and to the villanelle in particular:

¹William Wordsworth, The Poems of William Wordsworth (London: Humphrey Milford, 1916), p. 307.

²Sir Philip Sidney, The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

It was during my undergraduate days at Oxford; days of lyrical ardours and of studious sonnet writing; days when one loved the exquisite intricacy and musical repetitions of the ballade, and the villanelle with its linked long-drawn echoes and its curious completeness; days when one solemnly sought to discover the proper temper in which a triolet should be written; delightful days, in which I am glad to say, there was far more rhyme than reason.¹

The echoes and some degree of completeness may be found in Wilde's villanelles, but his comment about "far more rhyme than reason" points to their weakness. In the double villanelle, the contrast between its two parts is useful to this study in that it demonstrates the importance of the refrain, and while the first part is very much in the tradition of Dobson and Lang, the second part, whatever its weaknesses, does strike a slightly more serious note, albeit in a fairly conventional way.

The small number of villanelles by Wilde and the mention of Andrew Lang lead to the observation that whenever an enumeration is made of the poets associated with the cultivation of the French fixed forms, Andrew Lang is included in the group, even though the context may refer to a form rarely used by Lang.

In his poetical works, only two villanelles are to be found, neither of which seem to deserve particular study. The first, "Villanelle",² has the refrains: "Apollo left the golden muse/Theocritus of Syracuse", and closely resembles Dobson's "Theocritus" villanelle. Lang's second

¹Cohen, p. 90.

²Andrew Lang, The Poetical Works of Andrew Lang (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1923), III, 103. See Appendix, pp. 196-197.

"Villanelle"¹ has a dedication to "M. Joseph Boulmier, Author of 'Les Villanelles'", which at least tells us that Lang had read a work of significant importance to the history of the villanelle. This villanelle suggests that he had paid some attention to Boulmier's comments on the importance of the refrains: "Villanelle, why art thou mute?/Hath the Master lost his lute?". The theme of the poem may be summarized as follows: the Master, presumably Apollo or Pan, sang in Spring; why does he not sing now in Autumn with winter soon to come? Both of these villanelles satisfy the formal requirements of the villanelle, the second being more tightly organized chiefly because of the stronger link between the refrains.

The reader familiar with W.E. Henley's In Hospital might expect that if the villanelle is to be used at this time for more serious purposes, Henley might be a likely choice of poet to initiate the trend. But his attitude to the form, clearly shown in the following villanelle, helps to explain why he did not make use of it for serious matters. Indeed, it may help to explain why so many of his contemporaries may have avoided using the form altogether.

The Villanelle

A dainty thing's the Villanelle.
 Sly, musical, a jewel in rhyme,
 It serves its purpose passing well.

A double-clappered silver bell
 That must be made to clink in chime,
 A dainty thing's the Villanelle;

¹Lang, p. 131.

And if you wish to flute a spell,
 Or ask a meeting 'neath the lime,
 It serves its purpose passing well.

You must not ask of it the swell
 Of organs grandiose and sublime--
 A dainty thing's the Villanelle;

And, filled with sweetness, as a shell
 Is filled with sound, and launched in time,
 It serves its purpose passing well.

Still fair to see and good to smell
 As in the quaintness of its prime,
 A dainty thing's the Villanelle,
 It serves its purpose passing well.¹

As befits a poem on a poetic form, the structure is perfectly orthodox. Echoes of Banville and Gosse may be detected in "dainty", "jewel in rhyme" and "sweetness". "In the quaintness of its prime" is unmistakably a reference to Passerat. The second refrain, "It serves its purpose passing well" suggests tolerant amusement if not grudging admiration. The suggestion of proper subjects in stanza three is balanced by a warning against seriousness in stanza four. This damning with faint praise by a member of Gosse's circle and a poet who exhibited considerable regard for the French fixed forms may have been a significant factor in discouraging the use of the villanelle for more serious subjects.

Henley's two other villanelles, significantly presented as "Bric à brac" among his collected poems, show his practice as consistent with his theory:

¹William Ernest Henley, Works (New York: AMS Press, 1970), II, 228.

Villanelle

Where's the use of sighing?
 Sorrow as you may,
 Time is always flying-

Flying! -and defying
 Men to say him nay . . .
 Where's the use of sighing?

Look! To-day is dying
 After yesterday.
 Time is always flying.

Flying -and when crying
 Cannot make him stay,
 Where's the use of sighing?

Men with by-and-bying,
 Fritter life away.
 Time is always flying.

Flying! -O, from prying
 Cease, and go to play.
 Where's the use of sighing,
 'Time is always flying?'¹

In this first villanelle, we have a fairly conventional 'carpe diem' poem with a touch of resignation to it. There are echoes of Herrick's "To the Virgins", but there is less variety in Henley's poem, and the effect of tedium produced by the repeated feminine rhyme in "ing" may have been chosen deliberately to lead to the first two lines of the concluding stanza, lines which call for an end to the whole poem, giving the two refrains as the reason. This use of imitative harmony may also be noted in the third and last of Henley's villanelles:

¹Henley, p. 227.

Villanelle

In the clatter of the train
 Is a promise brisk and bright.
 I shall see my love again!

I am tired and fagged and fain;
 But I feel a still delight
 In the clatter of the train,

Hurry-hurrying on amain
 Through the moonshine thin and white-
 I shall see my love again!

Many noisy miles remain;
 But a sympathetic sprite
 In the clatter of the train

Hammers cheerful: -that the strain
 Once concluded and the fight,
 I shall see my love again.

Yes, the overword is plain,-
 If it's trivial, if it's trite-
 In the clatter of the train:
 'I shall see my love again.'¹

The poem consists of repetitions of the theme announced in the opening stanza, and the repetition itself is recognized as "trivial" and "trite"; but the repetition in sound and sense is relevant to the subject, train wheels. The relationship of the opening stanza to the rest of the poem and especially to the concluding stanza is thus carefully maintained. Within the limits he has set himself for this form, Henley handles the villanelle surely and with ease, avoiding suggestions of coyness, sentiment or the recondite, and always with his characteristic spareness of diction. The pity is that he did not see more serious possibilities in the villanelle.

¹Henley, p. 229.

These possibilities are seen by Ernest Dowson in 'carpe diem' or 'carpe florem' poems to which death or oblivion, stated or suggested, lend a sadness extending beyond sentiment. Dowson is well able to write the "dainty jewel" type of villanelle favored by Banville and Gosse, as may be seen in his "Villanelle of His Lady's Treasures"¹, but he seems to prefer the "carpe diem" theme, as evinced in his several poems, often with a Latin title expressing such a theme. His more thoughtful villanelles also favor this theme, an example of which is his "Villanelle of the Poet's Road":

Villanelle of the Poet's Road

Wine and woman and song,
Three things garnish our way:
Yet is day over long.

Lest we do our youth wrong,
Gather them while we may:
Wine and woman and song.

Three things render us strong,
Vine leaves, kisses and bay;
Yet is day over long.

Unto us they belong,
Us the bitter and gay,
Wine and woman and song.

We, as we pass along,
Are sad that they will not stay;
Yet is day over long.

Fruits and flowers among,
What is better than they:
Wine and woman and song?
Yet is day over long.²

¹Ernest Dowson, The Poems of Ernest Dowson (London: John Love, 1915), p. 52. See Appendix, p.199.

²Dowson, p. 129.

The first refrain suggests a 'carpe florem' poem of the conventional sort, but the second refrain introduces a darker note suggestive of satiety. The two refrains are not grammatically linked-- and this has been seen as a weakening factor in refrains that are merely exclamations-- but both are powerfully suggestive, the first by the familiarity of the expression, and the second by the increasing darkness of tone it acquires when juxtaposed to pleasures subject to the ennui of satiety. There is also a general development of the theme in the poem after the opening thematic statement: the second stanza expresses the traditional association of youth with the 'carpe diem' thought of its second line; the third stanza summarizes the three traditional pursuits of men of pleasure, wine, women and song; in the fourth stanza, the pursuit becomes bitter, as shown in the attitude of the pursuers; and in the fifth stanza, the impermanence traditionally associated with such pleasures is brought up. The concluding stanza evokes the three pleasures one last time, and after the break at the end of the third line, the concluding refrain states again the theme of satiety which had spoiled such pleasures throughout the poem. Much of the unity of theme and tone in the poem is due to the strong opposition between the refrains as their relationship evolves from weariness to disillusionment, but the refrains and Dowson's handling of them in this poem does not seem significantly more complex than in most the villanelles already examined.

However, in Dowson's "Villanelle of Marguerites", there is a complex use of refrain the like of which has not been hitherto encountered.

Villanelle of Marguerites

"A Little, passionately, not at all?"
 She casts the snowy petals on the air:
 And what care we how many petals fall!

Nay, wherefore seek the seasons to forestall?
 It is but playing, and she will not care,
 A little, passionately, not at all!

She would not answer us if we should call
 Across the years: her visions are too fair;
 And what care we how many petals fall!

She knows us not, nor recks if she enthrall
 With voice and eyes and fashion of her hair,
 A little, passionately, not at all!

Knee-deep she goes in meadow grasses tall,
 Kissed by the daisies that her fingers tear:
 And what care we how many petals fall!

We pass and go: but she shall not recall
 What men we were, nor all she made us bear:
 "A little, passionately, not at all!"¹
 And what care we how many petals fall!¹

The complexity here lies not only in the use but in the very nature of the refrains. The meaning of the refrains is not immediately or intrinsically clear, as has been most often the case. Is the "she" a particular woman or Woman? And what are these petals? As the poems develops, the tone and meaning of the refrains changes and increases in range, thus revealing in practice what had been suggested by Boulmier's theory.

¹Dowson, p. 17.

The first refrain is rich in meaning chiefly because of the contrasts it contains, each of its elements eliciting a different response from indifference to passion. When it first appears, it is a quotation, but not the "she loves me, she loves me not" associated with the daisy. Using the name Marguerite instead of daisy requires a similarly more elaborate form of the old riddle. The use of a quotation refers the reader back to the title, which may now be seen to mean "a villanelle belonging to or habitually used by Marguerite". The first recurrence of the refrain (Line 6) emphasizes the indifference of the lady, with some suggestion of bitterness on the part of the speaker (Line 12) reinforces this impression: she does not care, but it is the speaker who enumerates her enthralling qualities. In the final stanza, the quotation as such recurs after the first two lines, summarizing the lady's indifference to the speaker, to all men, and to whatever they may think of her indifference. Thus, this first refrain is consistently associated with the lady, her attitude or the speaker's notion of her attitude.

In similar fashion, the second refrain is more closely associated with the speaker and his reactions, generalized by "we" to include all men who have come into contact with this woman or beautiful, indifferent Woman. When she questions the flower, the speaker would have her go on, perhaps in hopes of a favorable choice from among the three alternatives, "A little, passionately, not at all". In the first recurrence of the petal refrain, the petals suggest the passage of time and our patience. In stanza five, the refrain suggests that amid a beautiful natural setting, it is still the lady rather than the setting we care about, thus emphasizing the power of her fascination. The final line of the poem iterates our

indifference to anything but her and her fascination. In addition to the theme just considered, the petal refrain also may be seen to express a subdued metaphor: for the marguerite, or Marguerite to lose petals as time or occasions pass, can also mean that she remains fascinating despite the effect of age, i.e., "Age cannot wither her"

The relationship between the two refrains in this poem deserves close attention, the first associated with the indifference of the lady, the second with the persistent attention of the speaker. After the statement of the themes in the first stanza, time and play and indifference are expressed in different combination, stanza five serving as a summary in a simple, natural scene. The final quatrain re-states the themes and the chief elements affecting them, time, indifference and suffering, and finally, the best summary, the refrains themselves, now that it is clear what they imply. Not the least reason for the effectiveness of the refrains is the way Dowson has closely linked them to the stanzas in which they appear. It suffices to recall practice of a Wilde¹ or a Dobson² to note the difference. Excepting the two quoted lines, the refrains are not refrains in the sense of mere repetitions or song refrains, but an integral part of the statement of each stanza; the refrains recur because some further significant meaning is being added to the poem. This organic use of the refrain is significantly related to the emancipation of villanelle from its clever or quaint phase. Dowson integrates his refrains fairly well in his "Villanelle of Acheron"³, and in this poem and in his

¹See above, p. 56.

²See above, p. 51.

³Dowson, p. 131. See Appendix, p. 200.

"Villanelle of Sunset"¹, he treats with a touch of sadness, resignation or regret of the peace of sleep and death, but nowhere heretofore, has such a complex use and integration of refrain been observed as may be seen in the villanelle just examined.

John Davidson is the last poet of this period whose villanelles will be considered in this study, and in at least two respects, his work differs significantly from that of the poets considered so far. The seriousness first detected in Dobson and then observed in Dowson becomes bleak pessimism as seen in Davidson's villanelles. He is the first English poet encountered to write villanelles only in a serious vein; none of his five villanelles resembles those of the Banville-Gosse tradition. He recalls Leconte de Lisle, not only by the seriousness of his villanelles, but also by the liberties he takes with the form of the refrains. These characteristics are well illustrated in the following poem:

The Price

Terrible is the price
Of beginning anew, of birth;
For Death has loaded dice.

Men hurry and hide like mice;
But they cannot evade the Earth,
And Life, Death's fancy price.

A blossom once or twice,
Love lights on Summer's hearth;
But Winter loads the dice.

In jangling shackles of ice,
Ragged and bleeding Mirth
Pays the Piper's price.

¹Dowson, p. 7. See Appendix, p. 198.

The dance is done in a thrice:
 Death belts his bony girth;
 And struts, and rattles his dice.

Let Virtue play or Vice,
 Beside his sombre firth
 Life is the lowest price
 Death wins with loaded dice.¹

In this villanelle, there is no 'refrain' in the strict sense of the term, since no line recurs in its original form. Rather, two complementary ideas alternate after their first appearance in the first stanza: the notion of the price exacted by death, and the notion that death cheats in exacting the price. The connecting elements of the middle stanzas do not seem to be the central ideas of the stanzas, but some image or symbolic element: from mice and earth in the second stanza, to blossom, summer and winter in stanza three; from hearth of summer in stanza three to shackles of ice in stanza four; death echoes the Mirth of stanza four in the next stanza, and leads to the traditional image of the dance of death, and once again, death's dice.

This way of linking the stanzas does not enhance the unity or clarity of the poem and from line to line the poet does not make his images cohere. For instance, the meaning of "price" in the second-last line of the poem agrees well with "wins", but the verb "wins" of the last line would better suit the word 'prize'. What is chiefly disturbing in this poem (and it may be added, in so much of Davidson's work) is the abundance of striking images, expressed with vigour, which, however, do not cohere

¹ John Davidson, The Poems of John Davidson, ed. Andrew Turnbull (Edinburgh: The Scottish Academic Press, 1973), p. 146.

into a clearly articulated whole; the images are clear but the relationships are vague or not developed. Davidson's use of the refrain clearly demonstrates the advantages of not allowing significant modification and of allowing some variation such as in prepositions. Two more examples will be adduced to support this view of his practice.

The Unknown
(Villanelle)

To brave and to know the unknown,
Is the high world's motive and mark,
Though the way with snares be strewn.

The earth itself alone
Wheels through the light and the dark
Onward to meet the unknown.

Each soul, upright or prone,
While the owl sings or the lark,
Must pass where the bones are strewn.

Power on the loftiest throne
Can fashion no certain ark
That shall stem and outride the unknown.

Beauty must doff her zone,
Strength trudge unarmed and stark
Though the way with eyes be strewn.

This only can atone,
The high world's motive and mark,
To brave and to know the unknown
Though the way with fire be strewn.¹

In this poem, as in "The Price", the opening stanza contains striking 'refrain' lines, only one of which recurs in the concluding stanza. Here too, association rather than logical development links the stanzas: the earth alone, then the soul alone, then power alone, and

¹Davidson, p. 146.

finally beauty and strength lead to the repeated theme of the concluding stanza. But each stanza is almost better by itself than read in the sequence of the poem, for the chief idea in each stanza is accompanied by a subordinate idea suggesting more than the stanza can make clear, and since the relationship with the ensuing stanza is generally tenuous, the series conveys an impression of switching from idea to idea. In stanza three, the last line suggests death, but the last line of stanza four which is constructed in parallel fashion, offers no advance on the earlier idea of death. Each triplet in the middle stanzas gives first an element which stands alone, then an accompanying circumstance, and finally the challenge or trial each element must undergo, but these challenges seem selected at random, in no developing order. Had uniform refrains been used, they could have supplied the want of continuity by linking each example to a central theme. For instance, the last line of the poem has a broad enough connotation to have been used in slightly modified form throughout the villanelle.

One last difficulty, perhaps characteristic of much of Davidson's poetry occurs in the concluding stanza, where the notion of atonement in the first line introduces a totally new concept strongly contrasting with the praise expressed in the opening stanza. The line has a fine, absolute sweep to it, but it suggests the conclusion of some poem other than this one, and this trait is not uncommon in the poetry of Davidson, the impact of a whole poem sacrificed to a telling phrase in its conclusion.

One last villanelle by John Davidson deserves to be examined, wherein a more careful respect of the refrain clearly enhances the unity of the villanelle.

Villanelle

The power we would amass
Escapes our faint desire;
The hours like coursers pass.

The world's a magic glass,
Wherein while we admire
The power we would amass,

And trim our hopes, alas,
Wild-eyed and shod with fire
The hours like coursers pass!

Though arms of beaten brass
Match not the soul's attire
Of power we should amass,

With Pegasus at grass,
We saunter in the mire,
While the hours like coursers pass.

Leave mead and hippocras:
With Hippocrene aspire
To power we must amass.

Relinquish creed and class;
Pursue through brake and briar
The power we shall amass,
On the swift hours as they pass.¹

Immediately noticeable is Davidson's choice of six tercets instead of the customary five, but numerous precedents such as Gosse's practice exist as a precedent for a longer villanelle. The infinitive of the verb "amass" in the first stanza remains throughout the poem, with only the auxiliary varying, and with it the expressed attitude towards

¹Davidson, p. 148.

both power and its amassing, from "would amass" to "should amass" to "must amass" and finally to resolution in "shall amass". The variation in the second refrain is slighter, the chief change being from simile to the object itself in the last stanza.

The horse imagery stated in the first stanza is not only repeated but reinforced by the images in lines 8, 13, 14, 16 and 17. Even the choice of classical image for inspiration, i.e., water from Pegasus's fountain, or Hippocrene is introduced by the mention of Pegasus in the fifth stanza. Throughout the poem, the contrast is maintained between our slowness and the rapid passing of time. Even here, the classical reference to arms of beaten brass, i.e., those of sulking Achilles, helps to link the themes of the poem. Two lines are less well woven into the fabric of the poem: "the magic glass of the world" (Line 4) seems isolated; this might be intended, with the isolation being used to stress how looking keeps one from doing, but it could also be a veiled allusion to II Corinthians, 12¹, or "The Lady of Shalott"². And once again, in the first line of the last stanza, Davidson cannot forbear mentioning his private credo; as in the previous villanelle, this somewhat heterogeneous element disturbs the development of the whole poem. However, this villanelle does provide better grounds for arguing in favour of some

¹The New English Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 221: "Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face."

²Alfred, Lord Tennyson, The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969), p. 357: "And moving through a mirror clear" That hangs before her all the year, Shadows of the world appear."

variation in the villanelle refrain, and the modest success of this poem suggests the limitations of such variation.

In summary of this study of the villanelle during its introductory period in English literature, it has been shown how closely initial English theory and practice was influenced by contemporary French experience of the form in the later nineteenth century. The importance of the refrain and the limits and possibilities of variation in the refrain have been explored. The gradual emergence of interest in the villanelle as a vehicle of expression for more serious thought has been traced to the beginning of the twentieth century. At this point in its history, the essential poetic qualities and possible weaknesses of the villanelle have become identified. It now remains to see what twentieth century metrists have to say about the villanelle form, to observe whether the villanelle will outgrow its reputation as a literary trifle, and above all, to examine what use notable practitioners of the villanelle will make of it in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER III

THE ENGLISH VILLANELLE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: MATURATION AND PROMISE

Before examining the use of the villanelle in the twentieth century by notable practitioners of the form, it has been thought useful to give a representative sampling of general critical comment and prescription on the villanelle by English critics and prosodists of the period in order to afford a clear point of departure in tracing the evolution of the villanelle.

Section 1

Twentieth Century Criticism of the Villanelle

Since no critic or prosodist has been found to deny to the English villanelle its French origin, and since all have been generally content to follow French critical theory and rules for the traditional form, in this survey only those critics or prosodists will be discussed whose comments are either somewhat at variance with earlier history, theory or practice, or whose comment appears significant for the development of the villanelle in English.

With the notable exception of John Davidson, poets using the villanelle in the nineteenth century generally conformed with the theory and practice recommended by Banville, Gosse or Henley. The reputation of the villanelle as a form suitable only for subjects of light verse fostered an attitude well illustrated by the implied criticism contained in the following poem by Edgar Lee Masters, taken from his Spoon River Anthology:

Petit, The Poet

Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick
 Tick, tick, tick, like mites in a quarrel -
 Faint iambics that the full breeze wakens -
 But the pine tree makes a symphony thereof.
 Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus.
 Ballades by the score with the same old thought:
 The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished;
 And what is love but a rose that fades?
 Life all around me here in the village:
 Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,
 Courage, constancy, heroism, failure -
 All in the loom, and oh, what patterns!
 Woodlands, meadows, streams and rivers -
 Blind to all of it all my life long.
 Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,
 Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
 Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,
 While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines!¹

This poem describes the moment of awareness of a poet who may have too sedulously cultivated a taste for the type of poetry exemplified by most nineteenth century villanelles. Masters must have read some of the numerous villanelles to appear in magazines of the period in which a delicately contrived villanelle on a genteel, slightly nostalgic theme would constitute a very acceptable contribution from belles-lettres.²

The criticism expressed in Masters' poem is germane to this study since the development of the villanelle towards maturity is precisely away from the theme of "the snows and roses of yesterday" (L. 7) towards the more serious themes adumbrated in "Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,/ Courage, constancy, heroism, dailure" (L. 7, 8). But here, a note of caution: the pioneers of the form in English were right, and the villanelle does

¹Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 109.

²For instance, L.H. Foote's "Villanelle: The Gloaming," Overland, 29 (May 1897), p. 515.

lend itself eminently well to wit, grace and humour as suggested by Banville, Gosse and Henley; seeking for it new and more serious areas of human experience should not imply negating or denying to it those areas for which it has been traditionally and so well used.

The complexity of the villanelle form, especially when linked to wit and humour, has led to criticism and a degree of misesteem, as evinced in the following facetious villanelle by W.W. Skeat, the noted English philologist:

Villanelle

How to compose a villanelle which is said to
require "an elaborate amount of care in
production, which those who read only would
hardly suspect existed."

It's all a trick, quite easy when you know it,
As easy as reciting ABC;
You need not be an atom of a poet.

If you've a grain of wit, and want to show it,
Writing a villanelle - take this from me -
It's all a trick, quite easy when you know it.

You start a pair of rimes, and then you "go it"
With rapid-running pen and fancy free;
You need not be an atom of a poet.

Take any thought, write round it or below it,
Above or near it, as it liketh thee;
It's all a trick, quite easy when you know it.

Pursue your task, till, like a shrub, you grow it,
Up to the standard size it ought to be;
You need not be an atom of a poet.

Clear it of weeds and water it, and hoe it,
Then watch it blossom with triumphant glee.
It's all a trick, quite easy when you know it;
You need not be an atom of a poet.¹

¹Walter William Skeat, "Villanelle", The Silver Treasury of Light Verse (New York: The New American Library, 1957), p. 108.

Skeat seems to be taking to task a certain pretentiousness expressed in the epigraph to the poem, but perhaps the implied criticism should not be taken too seriously, since the awkwardness of "as it liketh thee" and of the imagery of the shrub, as well as his rhyming of "poet" with "grow it" suggest that composing villanelle is not "all a trick, quite easy when you know it". Gosse had warned against just such an abuse of the fixed forms¹, but Henley's "The Villanelle"² on the villanelle would hardly provide a corrective to Skeat's opinion.

Critics and prosodists in the twentieth century have shown little taste for speculation about the villanelle; prescription has invariably followed practice and has been slow to recognize change in content or form. Two causes for this attitude may be discerned: the form and origin of the villanelle are associated uniquely with Jean Passerat and his "Tourterelle" poem³, and this has had the effect of reducing speculation such as one encounters in such other forms as the sonnet or triolet where the association with a single author or form is not as great; the other cause is simply the relatively small number of villanelles written. Boulmier seems to be the only author in French or English to have written more than a half dozen villanelles⁴. The Banville-Gosse tradition of the light villanelle may have deflected critics from speculating about the possibilities of the form. The rhyme-royal and sestina may not be as numerous as the sonnet or ballade, but unlike the villanelle, they have not been

¹Gosse, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse", p. 71

²See above, p.60.

³See above, p.16.

⁴Boulmier, Villanelles.

consistently associated with light verse and without examples of significant serious use. All critics, French or English, agree in recognizing the complexity of the villanelle, and yet the triolet, when its resources are fully understood and used, may suggest an equal complexity¹. Perhaps the number of refrains in the villanelle militates against its being written in sequences, no more than two villanelles in sequence or specifically related having been discovered. Wilde's example in his "double villanelle", "Pan"², may be of doubtful value; had he chosen to add a third villanelle to "Pan" in the same vein, the effect of eighteen refrains in such short compass would have been one of insufferable cleverness. Even when otherwise unassociated, villanelles rarely appear in groups: occasionally a pair are encountered and, very infrequently, three villanelles, usually separated by one or more poems in other forms³.

George Saintsbury's massive history of English prosody⁴ illustrates the instance where if a critic or prosodist is inimical to the French fixed forms in general, the villanelle will receive very scant attention, in this case not being given even an index listing. However, what Saintsbury has to say about certain aspects of the French fixed forms and their history has significant bearing on this study of the villanelle:

¹Marcotte, "An Introduction to the Triolet".

²See above, p. 56.

³For example, Davidson and Henley have unrelated villanelles published on consecutive pages.

⁴George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1923).

The central principle of all these forms (French fixed forms) is the favorite medieval device of the refrain used not casually, nor merely as a tip and catch to the stanza, but incorporated with it, and with the whole poem, on definite principles; thus standing to poetic, or at least prosodic, structure very much as the steel rods in concrete do to the new fashion of architecture - that of Jeremiah as some say, Neo-Cyclopean as others call it.¹

The comparison of the refrain to reinforcing steel rods is excellent, and Saintsbury's comment on the refrain could serve as a succinct statement of what was to be learned from the use of the refrain by the nineteenth century practitioners of the villanelle: not the "tip and catch" observed in Wilde², but the incorporation noted in Dowson³, with the refrains serving to integrate and not to divide the whole poem.

Saintsbury further notes how the refrain "may work its way through the stanzas in different places, like something settling through clear water at different levels"⁴. The image is apposite and shows even greater insight if Saintsbury means not only that the refrain changes meaning with the stanza in which it recurs, but that various levels of meaning are expressed. Saintsbury's concluding remarks on the earlier history of the French forms well summarize, at least for the villanelle, their disuse when "the Pléiade threw cold water on these now old-fashioned things in favour of what they thought [my italics] more classical forms" [e.g., ode, elegy, epic, etc.]⁵

¹Saintsbury, p. 388.

²See above, p. 56.

³Dowson, "Villanelle of Marguerites".

⁴Sainstbury, loc. cit.

⁵Ibid, p. 388.

Saintsbury's attitude to the French forms in modern times is clearly seen in the diction of his comment about how the French Romantic school "naturally fished them up again; and in its second generation especially, Théodore de Banville produced exceedingly charming examples which were certain, sooner or later, to found a school"¹. Once again recurs the association of the villanelle with "charming"². In the brief passage devoted to the discussion of the French forms, Saintsbury does not mention the villanelle, though his recommending of some licence in the rules for the ballade and rondeau might well apply to the villanelle if used judiciously as he suggests.

Helen Cohen's contribution to the history of the French forms and of the villanelle has been discussed³. The brevity of Cohen's comments on the particular characteristics of the villanelle form has generally been imitated by critics and prosodists since 1922, when her Lyric Forms from France was published. Most of the villanelles it contains belong to the Banville-Gosse tradition of 'carpe florem' and 'carpe diem' verse, tributes to departing or belletristic praise in the classical vein. None would significantly add to what has been seen in nineteenth century villanelles already examined, though two poems in the collection will be analysed in connection with other, later critics or prosodists⁴.

¹Saintsbury, p. 389.

²See above, p. 45.

³See above, p. 16.

⁴See below, pp. 34, 88.

In 1936, W.F. Thrall and C.A. Hibbard typically perpetuate the concept of the villanelle as a form chiefly suitable for light verse:

A French verse form calculated, through its complexity and artificiality, to give an impression of simplicity and spontaneity. The villanelle was perhaps originally chiefly pastoral and an element of formal lightness is still uppermost since it most frequently used for poetic expression which is idyllic, delicate, simple and slight.¹

Such a description suggests that the authors had not read villanelles Davidson or Leconte de Lisle, and the "calculated artificiality" they mention is not easily reconciled with the views of Gosse on the French forms² or those of Saintsbury³, although the phrase "most frequently used" does hint at possible exceptions.

More recently, in 1954, Louis Untermeyer, whose "Lugubrious Villanelle of Platitudes" had been included in Cohen's anthology⁴, has taken a very general view of the history of the villanelle. He notes that in its early form, "it was a sort of shepherd's song used almost entirely for pastoral subjects or idyllic effects"⁵. After commenting briefly on the artificiality of its simplicity, Untermeyer cites Henley's "The Villanelle"⁶ as having "described the very essence of the villanelle" and concludes that the villanelle "like the triolet, is not usually employed for serious effects"⁷. However, he then mentions Edwin Arlington

¹William Flint Thrall, and C. Addison Hibberd, A Handbook to Literature (New York, Doubleday, 1936), p. 505.

²See above, p. 45.

³See above, p. 80.

⁴See appendix, p. 201.

⁵Louis Untermeyer, The Forms of Poetry, revised edition (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1954), p. 95.

⁶See above, p. 60.

⁷Untermeyer, loc. cit.

Robinson's "The House on the Hill"¹ as an exception to the rule. This first digression in English criticism from the general attitude of prosodists is somewhat spoiled by Untermeyer's ensuing comment that the form "lends itself to a combination of quaintness and flippancy", illustrated by the following villanelle by Franklin P. Adams:

Villanelle, With Stevenson's Assistance

The world is so full of a number of things
 Like music and pictures and statues and plays,
 I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

We've winters and summers and autumns and springs,
 We've Aprils and Augusts, Octobers and Mays -
 The world is so full of a number of things.

Though minor the key of my lyrical strings,
 I change it to major when paening praise:
 I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Each morning a myriad wonderments brings,
 Each evening a myriad marvels conveys,
 The world is so full of a number of things.

With pansies and roses and pendants and rings,
 With purples and yellows and scarlets and grays,
 I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

So pardon a bard if he caressly sings
 A solo endorsing these Beautiful Days -
 The world is so full of a number of things,²
 I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Cohen has also included this villanelle in her anthology³. Untermeyer refers to it as dexterous witticism, as the author of the "Lugubrious Villanelle of Platitudes"⁴ might well do, but only the irony suggested by

¹Analysed and discussed below, p. 88.

²Untermeyer, p. 96.

³Cohen, p. 441.

⁴Ibid, p. 440.

the endless series of clichés prevent Adams' villanelle from being tedious. Trifles such as these villanelles explain the disdain expressed in Skeat's "Villanelle"¹. What is chiefly puzzling about Untermeyer's comment is how he as editor of an anthology² published before the appearance of his Forms of Poetry and containing Davidson's "The Unknown", Dowson's "Villanelle of Marguerites" and W.H. Auden's "Villanelle"³, should have chosen to remain silent about these serious villanelles, and to refer only to the quaint and flippant aspects of the villanelle.

One of the few works on English prosody to acknowledge the villanelle as a possibly suitable form for more serious matter is the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics⁴ which notes Leconte de Lisle's use of the form as a vehicle for philosophic content and the sombre effect of Robinson's "The House on the Hill"⁵. More significant for this study is the remark that, more recently, "Dylan Thomas 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' restored a majestic seriousness to the villanelle"⁶.

A further step in the development of appreciation of the villanelle may be seen in the criticism of Sara de Ford and Clarinda Hariss Lott suggesting that nineteenth century poets may have been remiss in not using the French forms for more serious subject matter:

¹See above, p. 78.

²Louis Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936), pp. 81, 159, 479.

³Discussed below, p. 130.

⁴Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed., Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 893.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Discussed below, p. 130.

As a result of the emphasis on technical virtuosity, critics and scholars until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have tended to regard the French forms in English as vehicles for technical ingenuity and light graceful ideas -- nothing more. ¹

When discussing the effectiveness of the refrain in the French forms, de Ford and Lott refer to Robinson's "The House on the Hill"², a serious villanelle, as an example. They are also the first critics in modern times to show an awareness of prosodic evolution, at least inasmuch as their comment on the French forms applies to the villanelle:

Although Victorian practitioners of the French forms in English generally chose to imitate the formal pattern quite exactly, modern writers tend to vary the subject matter and to experiment with the use of approximate rather than exact rhymes.³

This comment about the modern use of approximate rhyme suggests that, with respect to the villanelle, they may be referring to the villanelles of Theodore Roethke⁴, and it is odd that de Ford and Lott do not mention variation in the refrain, a licence more frequently encountered, although they have shown discrimination in selecting Dowson's excellent "Villanelle of Marguerites"⁵ as the illustration for the villanelle form.

This appraisal of prosodic comment and theory concludes with an examination of two works, the first illustrative of the worst type of

¹Sara De Ford and Clarinda Harriss Lott, Forms of Verse, British and American (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1971), p. 241.

²Ibid., p. 243 (The poem is discussed below, p.88).

³Loc. cit.

⁴Discussed below, p. 140.

⁵Discussed above, p. 66.

criticism, the second evincing the interest of a critic and poet.

Elizabeth Drew sees the interest in the French forms as "a passing fashion . . . promoted by a group of minor poets, of whom the chief were Swinburne, Austin Dobson, Andrew Lang, W.E. Henley and Edmund Gosse"¹. In this hazily erroneous generalization is another instance of the faulty inference that all poets interested in the French forms generally were interested or wrote poetry in all of the forms. In fact, no published villanelles by Swinburne have been discovered, and Lang's two villanelles² hardly qualify him as a serious practitioner of the form. Drew's comment that "the poems themselves are not interesting"³, without further explanation, congruently concludes an uninformative entry.

In contrast, Babette Deutsch notes⁴ that the villanelle is one of the most adaptable of the French forms, cites Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" as a famous example, and most illuminatingly of all, offers a serious villanelle of her own composition⁵ as the illustration to her definition, thus showing a creative commitment to the form.

In conclusion to this sampling of general critical comment and prescription on the villanelle, it should be noted how tardy the change

¹Elizabeth Drew, Poetry: A Modern Guide to Its Understanding and Enjoyment (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1950), p. 281.

²See above, p. 59.

³Drew, p. 282.

⁴Babette Deutsch, Poetry Handbook: A Dictionary of Terms, 2nd ed. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1962), p. 167.

⁵Discussed below, p. 161.

has been in the attitude of critics and prosodists towards the villanelle, how its initial associations in English have not been beneficial to its development as a vehicle for serious poetic expression, and that only lately has the capacity of the form in this area been recognized.

Section 2

Representative Villanelles in the Twentieth Century

The primary criterion adopted in selecting villanelles to be examined in this section has been the significance of their contribution to the evolution and development of the villanelle, and the order of their presentation has been determined by the same criterion. The poets represented in this study, beginning with Edwin Arlington Robinson just before the turn of the century and ending with John Glassco in the 1970's, includes, in order of presentation, James Joyce, W.H. Auden, William Empson, Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethke, Malcolm Lowry and Babette Deutsch.

Although Edwin Arlington Robinson's villanelle "The House on the Hill" was written in 1894¹, it deserves to be included in a study of twentieth century villanelles, not only because critics and prosodists have referred to it to illustrate the new seriousness associated with the twentieth century villanelle, but also because relatively more information is available about the composition of the poem and about the author's attitude to the villanelle form. Two versions of the poem present differences which afford insight into the composition of the

¹Edwin Arlington Robinson, Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry De Forest Smith, 1890-1905, ed., Denham Sutcliffe (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 131.

poem and provide illustrative material for the discussion of organic unity and the use of refrain in the villanelle. For ease of study, the two versions are presented side by side, and for the sake of clarity are referred to as version A and version B:

The House on the Hill.
(Villanelle of Departure.)

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

Malign them as we may,
We cannot do them ill:
They are all gone away.

Are we more fit than they
To meet the Master's will?--
There is nothing more to say.

What matters it who stray
Around the sunken sill?--
They are all gone away,

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

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say. . . .¹

The House on the Hill

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

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

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

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

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

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.²

Version A has the subtitle "(Villanelle of Departure)" which may have led Emery Neff to see in this poem "a contemporary local tragedy -- the forsaking of the East for the broader lands and wider opportunities of the West"³. But the same biographer notes that Robinson showed little

¹Robinson, Untriangulated Stars, p. 132.

²Edwin Arlington Robinson, Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 81

³Emery Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948), p. 53.

interest at that time in social problems as themes for his poetry. Excepting the punctuation of the second line of the first stanza, a comma substituted for a colon, and the concluding punctuation of the poem, a period substituted for ellipsis periods, the first, fifth and last stanzas are identical. The effect of the colon in the first stanza of version A is to emphasize the causal relationship between the first two lines and the last line of the stanza, but perhaps a more sombre effect is achieved in version B by having the three phrases fall in a steady beat. The ellipsis periods at the close of version A suggest a silence that continues, perhaps with the possibility of something more to say even though "They are all gone away" (line 18). The period concluding version B is more final and evokes more closely the tone of the opening stanza.

A more substantial difference can be noted in the middle stanzas: stanzas two and three of version A focus more attention on the speaker and observers by the "we" of lines four, five and seven, and raises unanswered ethical questions, since why should we "Malign them" (line 4) or "do them ill" (line 5)? What is the purpose of the contest to do "the Master's will" (line 8)? By the capitalization of "Master", the reference is to God, but the question remains of just what God's will is as the basis of the contest. Thus, stanzas two and three introduce an ethical element not present in the opening stanza, and offend Boulmier's prescription regarding the thematic function of the opening tercet². The note of dismissal in the refrain of stanza three, "There is nothing more to say" seems a feeble response to the question of God's will.

¹Loc. cit.

²See above, p.31.

In stanzas two and three of version B, Robinson deletes the reference to God, emphasizes the desolate atmosphere of the abandoned house in stanza two, and stresses the absence of anyone's opinion, good or bad, of the house's former inhabitants: "Nor is there one today/To speak them good or ill" (Lines 7, 8). This neutral emptiness contrasts with the malice mentioned in line four of version A.

A certain ambiguity could be observed in stanza four of version A, where those "who stray" (Line 10) might be the same persons as "They" in "They are all gone away" (Line 12). In version B, it is clearly "we" who stray, though "They are all gone away", and this idea of fascination with empty houses explains the "fancy-play" of "And our poor fancy-play/For them is wasted skill" of the fifth stanza. Our curiosity needs no prepared excuse for our loitering about the empty house: we will never meet the former inhabitants, so "There is nothing more to say" (Line 12) a line introduced as a consequence by the colon of line eleven.

The quatrain in both versions summarizes the tone and feeling of the poem, perhaps more cogently in version B since no extraneous themes have been introduced to break the unity of the poem and since the poem has been more closely focussed on the house and its abandonment. Neff reports¹ that the version A in print dissatisfied Robinson with two of its stanzas, but does not explain the nature of Robinson's dissatisfaction.

More significant are Robinson's own remarks about the composition of the poem and about the villanelle form:

¹Neff, p. 54.

The past week has been a rather dull one for me and pretty much wasted. I have not been able to do much of any work, for some reason I cannot explain. I have felt well enough bodily but I have been in a bad mood. Yesterday I partially drove it off by making a rondeau and a villanelle. The latter is a little mystical perhaps and is an attempt to show the poetry of the commonplace. Here it is, -- you may judge for yourself. Tell me what you think of it and do not be afraid of hurting my feelings.

The House on the Hill.
(Villanelle of Departure.)

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

Malign them as we may,
We cannot do them ill:
They are all gone away.

Are we more fit than they
To meet the Master's will?--
There is nothing more to say.

What matters it who stray
Around the sunken sill?--
They are all gone away,

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

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

This kind of thing may not interest you much, and please do not hesitate to say so if that be the case. These old French forms always had a fascination for me which I never expect to outgrow. I don't know that I care to outgrow it, but still it interferes with my more serious work to an unpleasant extent. When one of the things begin to run in my mind there is little rest for me until it is out. Fortunately this one was made very quickly (in about twenty minutes) so did not steal much of my time.¹

¹Robinson, Untriangulated Stars, p. 132.

Robinson's comment about the villanelle being "a little mystical" illustrates what Ellsworth Barnard has said about Robinson's attitude towards his readers:

Moreover, even when the substance of his poetry is not in itself hard to comprehend, Robinson is evidently beset by the fear of making it too obvious -- by an apparent dread of insulting his readers, to whom he ascribes as acute a sensitiveness to unspoken overtones of thought or feeling as he himself possessed. And he seems never to have been able to perceive the irony of this attitude.¹

This "sensitiveness to unspoken overtones" is perhaps the most admirable quality of Robinson's "The House on the Hill", and Robinson's reference to this villanelle as "an attempt to show the poetry of the commonplace" is a welcome corrective, both to the charm of the Banville-Gosse tradition, and by the power of its understatement, the magniloquence of Davidson's villanelles.²

Unfortunately, Robinson tends to consider his poems in the French forms as something apart from his "serious work", probably the effect of the contemporary attitude towards the villanelle which "The House on the Hill" did so much to change. Robinson's comment about this poem taking twenty minutes to compose should be noted by prosodists and critics who dwell on the complexity of the villanelle form. And his comment, "When one of the things begins to run in my mind, there is little rest for me until it is out"³, suggests the proper approach to the villanelle refrains, themes which ring their changes in the poet's mind until they receive

¹Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 26.

²See above, p. 69.

³Robinson, Untriangulated Stars, p. 133.

formal utterance in the poem, and not just the juggling of refrains to satisfy the rules of a form.

"The House on the Hill" contrasts with most villanelles of the nineteenth century precisely by being poetry of the commonplace, "laden with a faintly bitter but unprotesting acknowledgement that the past is irretrievable".¹ Dobson and Dowson favored this topic of passing time, and Robinson's earlier and only other villanelle, his "Villanelle of Change", recalls their belletristic poems with its refrains: "Since Persia fell at Marathon/Long centuries have come and gone"². Robinson recognized the pitfalls of the form and was aware of its current tradition:

I have a weakness for the suggestiveness of those artificial forms -- that is, when they treat of something besides bride-roses and ball-rooms. Vers de société pure and simple, has little charm for me. Austin Dobson might be twice the man he is if he were -- somebody else, I suppose; but it does seem that he might have used his talents to a little better advantage. "Don Quixote" shows what is in him; if it could be let out, England would be the richer by another poet.³

As the poet who, by means of "The House on the Hill", showed the way out of ball-rooms and away from bride-roses, Robinson has received recognition from critics and prosodists⁴ and has pointed the way to the modern serious villanelle.

The next villanelle to be examined in this study is the poem appearing in chapter five of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man⁵

¹Barnard, p. 59.

²Robinson, Collected Poems, p. 80.

³Ibid, Untriangulated Stars, p. 146.

⁴See pp. 83, 85, 86.

⁵James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 223.

which James Joyce had called "The Villanelle of the Temptress" at the time of its composition¹. Apart from its intrinsic merit, the villanelle deserves study because of the insight afforded by the context regarding the creation of the poem. This villanelle is part of the novel, bound inextricably into the description of Stephen's reverie, the text of which explains the genesis of the poem. It is not suggested that the creation of a villanelle requires the type of experience described in this novel, as Robinson's account of his composition reminds us, but there are interesting points of similarity between what both accounts reveal about the villanelle.

The episode dealing with the composition of "The Villanelle of the Temptress" is set off from the rest of the text by asterisks. As Stephen awakes in a state of enchantment, his thoughts dwell on the unnamed girl of his fantasies² until the first stanza of the poem takes shape:

O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh. Gabriel the seraph had come to the virgin's chamber. An afterglow deepened within his spirit whence the white flame had passed, deepening to a rose and ardent light. That rose and ardent light was her strange wilful heart, strange that no man had known or would know, wilful from the beginning of the world: and lured by that ardent roselike glow the choirs of the seraphim were falling from heaven.

¹Stanislaus Joyce, My Brother's Keeper (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 100.

²Named Emma Clery in the first draft of A Portrait of the Artist, Stephen Hero (New York: New Directions, 1955), p. 215 et passim. Stanislaus Joyce remarks (My Brother's Keeper, p. 158) that Joyce "also blends the figure of Mary Sheehy in the novel with an imaginary girl-child whom Dedalus is supposed to have had a fleeting affection for as a boy". Mary Sheehy was the daughter of an hospitable family whom Joyce visited in his student days (see Richard Ellman, James Joyce (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 52.

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

The verses passed from his mind to his lips and, murmuring them over, he felt the rhythmic movement of a villanelle pass through them. The roselike glow sent forth its rays of rhyme; ways, days, blaze, praise, raise. Its rays burned up the world, consumed the hearts of men and angels: the rays from the rose that was her wilful heart.

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

And then? The rhythm died away, ceased, began again to move and beat. And then? Smoke, incense ascending from the altar of the world.

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

Smoke went up from the whole earth, from the vapoury oceans, smoke of her praise. The earth was like a swinging smoking swaying censer, a ball of incense, an ellipsoidal ball. The rhythm died out at once; the cry of his heart was broken. His lips began to murmur the first verses over and over; then went on stumbling through half verses, stammering and baffled; then stopped. The heart's cry was broken. ¹

It is interesting to observe in this passage how the images are associated and coalesce until they are distilled into the opening tercet. But it is only after these lines are conceived and Stephen is "murmuring them over" that the "rhythmic movement of a villanelle" passes through these murmurs, and from the original tercet, "rays of rhyme" assume the shape of his thought in the second tercet. There is then a pause: "The rhythm dies away, ceased, began again to move and beat". It has not been a process of seeking rhymes to fit the poem, but an echoing of refrains

¹James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist, p. 217.

into rhymes which best serve to express the poet's thought. Gradually, the images become more liturgical, new images being evoked from the opening stanza. But the creative movement ebbs and murmuring the verses will not help, "The heart's cry was broken".

Stephen carefully writes out the stanzas, and with returning memories of the girl, his reveries continue until once again images of the preceding stanzas slip into the flow of his thoughts, and the image of the eucharist, almost as a catalyst, leads into two more tercets:

The radiant image of the eucharist united again in an instant his bitter and despairing thoughts, their cries arising unbroken in a hymn of thanksgiving.

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

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

He spoke the verses aloud from the first lines till the music and rhythm suffused his mind, turning it to quiet indulgence; then copied them painfully to feel them the better by seeing them; then lay back on his bolster.¹

Stephen's speaking the verses aloud emphasizes the auditory and rhythmic aspects of the villanelle, the incantatorial characteristic which can be assumed by the refrains. This passage recalls Robinson's comment about "when one of the things begin to run in my mind. . . ."². Stephen's careful copying of the verse directs attention to their visual quality

¹James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist, p. 221

²See above, p. 92.

"to feel them the better by seeing them", after their musical qualities have been appreciated, "till the rhythm and music suffused his mind".

Stephen continues to muse until a more sensual vision of the girl occurs to him, suggesting the concluding quatrain of the villanelle:

A glow of desire kindled again his soul and fired and fulfilled all his body. Conscious of his desire she was waking from odorous sleep, the temptress of his villanelle. Her eyes, dark and with a look of languor, were opening to his eyes. Her nakedness yielded to him, radiant, warm, odorous and lavish-limbed, enfolded him like a shining cloud, enfolded him like water with a liquid life: and like a cloud of vapour or like waters circumfluent in space the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, flowed forth over his brain.

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. ¹

¹James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist, p. 223.

The first line of the quatrain summarizes the whole outline of the episode, and the second line epitomizes the thought of the preceding prose paragraph. The vision having been evoked, the vocative refrains of the villanelle recur to complete the poem.

Throughout the poem the refrains remain invariable, their only modification being the transposition of the question mark, placed at the end of the second line in the first stanza so as to complete the sentence, but occurring elsewhere at the end of the refrain. The two refrains are complementary, both being vocatives, the first in interrogatory form, the second of more admonitory nature, i.e. an admonition following upon a rhetorical question. Seen as a whole, the poem draws its coherence chiefly from the refrains and the liturgical images suggestive of an increasingly reverential tone. The context helps the reader to follow the emotional development of the poem, which otherwise might be more difficult to follow because of the esoteric nature of the imagery.

However, the relationship of each refrain to the stanza in which it appears is not consistently close. The refrains of the first tercet have already received comment; "lure" (Line 2) and "enchanted" (Line 3) provide a further associative link between the first two lines and the third. "Ablaze" (Line 4) and "ardent" (line 6) provide a similar verbal link in the second stanza in which the refrain logically follows the first two lines. But in stanzas three and four, the refrain line is set off from the rest of the stanza by a full stop. The vocative refrains of these two stanzas are not grammatically linked to the other two lines of the tercet in which each appears and depend to a greater extent on the entire poem for their meaning. The refrain of the fifth tercet is more

closely integrated into the stanza by its grammatical relationship to the preceding lines. The quatrain relates to the whole poem rather than to the preceding tercet, summarizing the speaker's attitude after the described relationships of woman to man and seraphim in the middle tercets: the fascination remains, and the concluding refrains repeat the opening themes, now in a tone of appeal rather than the more questioning tone of the opening tercet.

Since this villanelle was written at an earlier stage of Joyce's career than the novel in which it appears¹, as one of his "Shine and Dark" poems written c.1901² when Joyce was in his teens, it is not surprising that it should resemble villanelles of the Banville-Gosse tradition by its theme of the fascination of woman. The liturgical imagery of the poem is, moreover, new and somewhat recondite, suggestive of the allusiveness of twentieth century poetry; the sensuality of a line such as "With languorous look and lavish limb" has more of the Edwardian than the modern to it. The process of composition described in the context serves to emphasize the importance of the refrains, but the actual use of the refrains in the poem does not exhibit a skill significantly superior to that observed in several earlier villanelles, notably that of Dowson in "Villanelle of Marguerites"³.

The poet whose villanelles will next be considered is W.H. Auden, three of whose poems present an interesting variety of approach to the

¹ Stanislaus Joyce, My Brother's Keeper, p. 100.

² Ellman, James Joyce, p. 84.

³ See above, p. 66.

villanelle form. The first poem, in villanelle form without verbal refrains, consists of five tercets and a quatrain on two rhymes in villanelle order, and is referred to by one critic as a "pseudo-villanelle"¹:

Alone

Each lover has some theory of his own
About the difference between the ache
Of being with his love, and being alone:

Why What, when dreaming, is dear flesh and bone
That really stirs the senses, when awake,
Appears a simulacrum of his own.

Narcissus disbelieves in the unknown;
He cannot join his image in the lake
So long as he assumes he is alone.

The child, the waterfall, the fire, the stone,
Are always up to mischief, though, and take
The universe for granted as their own.

The elderly, like Proust, are always prone
To think of love as a subjective fake;
The more they love, the more they feel alone.

Whatever view we hold, it must be shown
Why every lover has a wish to make
Some other kind of otherness his own:
Perhaps, in fact, we never are alone.¹

The absence of refrain in this poem provides considerable insight into what the refrain contributes to a villanelle. Repeatedly in this study the importance of the refrain has been emphasized and has often been seen to be of critical importance to a poem, but so far, the villanelles of Davidson represented the farthest departure from orthodox practice in this

¹John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), p. 287.

²Wystan Hugh Auden, Collected Shorter Poems 1930-1944 (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1950), p. 199.

respect¹. The question here arises of whether "Alone" can properly be called a villanelle. Auden's interest in poetic form is well known, and one comment of his about the poet's use of formal elements seems relevant to his practice in "Alone":

Rhymes, meter, stanza forms, etc., are like servants. If the master is fair enough to win their affection and firm enough to command their respect, the result is an orderly happy household. If he is too tyrannical, they give notice; if he lacks authority, they become slovenly, impertinent, drunk and dishonest.²

In "Alone", Auden may drop the verbal refrain, but he carefully conforms to the other rules of the villanelle. The opening tercet does state the theme of the poem, the first and third lines forming together a logical unit in which the two lines are complementary and somewhat antithetical: each lover has his own theory about being with his love and being alone. The two lines contain the key ideas that will recur in the poem: lover, theory, self (own) and alone. The idea of the first tercet is carried into the second tercet, firstly by the colon ending the first tercet which suggests that the second tercet is an explanation or expansion, but even more strongly by the sixth line, "Appears a simulacrum of his own", which should normally be a refrain, the repetition of line one; however, Auden has chosen not to repeat the words, but to retain only the central notion of the first line, and this is what he will do with all the remaining refrain lines of the poem.

¹See above, p. 69.

²W.H. Auden, The Dyer 's Hand (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 22.

The next three tercets develop variations on the theme of the opening tercet. The reference to the Narcissus myth in stanza three as an instance of each lover's peculiar theory recalls Auden's reflections on our preoccupation with our image in "The Well of Narcissus"¹, and illustrates the paradox of being in love with oneself. The last line of stanza three, in a usual villanelle, would repeat line three of the opening tercet. "Of being with his love, and being alone" (Line 3) becomes "So long as he assumes he is alone", but then Narcissus is alone with his love. Thus, again, Auden has kept the sense of the refrain without its words.

The next variation, in stanza four, presents examples of self-centredness or disregard for others: the child's play in his world, the fire burns what it touches, the waterfall wears in its falling, the stone is static in a fluid world. By analogy, as suggested in "take/The universe for granted as their own" (Lines 11, 12), for child, waterfall, fire and stone, it is to have "some theory" (Line 1) of their own.

A last variation on the opening theme is presented in stanza five, with love and time meeting in old age, and the elderly "prone/To think of love as a subjective fake" (Lines 13, 14). The mention of Proust is a deft allusion, recalling the emotionally sceptical author of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. The last line of this stanza, "The more they love, the more they feel alone" suggests the neglected parent or lover syndrome of old age, and echoes the sense of "Each lover has some theory of his own" (Line 1).

¹Auden, The Dyer's Hand, Part Three, especially pp. 93-96.

The concluding quatrain, with its own type of refrain, is most satisfactory as a villanelle quatrain: it sums up the poem and, now with greater meaning, reiterates its opening themes. "Whatever view we hold" (Line 16) refers to the variations of the middle tercets. The "wish to make/Some other kind of otherness his own" (Lines 17, 18) can now make clearer "The ache/Of being with his love, and being alone" (Lines 1, 2). "Some other kind of otherness" (Line 18) repeats the thought of "some theory of his own" (Line 1), just as the last line of the poem, "Perhaps, in fact, we never are alone" explains the paradox of "Of being with his love, and being alone (Line 3) by suggesting the distinction between physical and psychological presence. "Perhaps" of line 19 indicates that the solution proposed is not final, and "it must be shown" (Line 16) suggested further consideration. The "we" of the final line includes the speaker among the lovers, and thus, as suggested by the title, equally alone.

Without verbal refrains, the litany quality, the repetition which may express concern, obsession, pleading or emotional involvement, seems lacking. For a poem about man's ultimate isolation in love, this poem is remarkably unemotional and ratiocinative. One critic has commented on the particularly gnomic quality of the poem "because the lyrical element of the form's artifice has been removed"¹, but simply to index the poem as a pseudo-villanelle merely sidesteps the problem of deciding whether it is a villanelle or not.

¹Fuller, p. 179.

A conditional acceptance of this poem as a true villanelle is proposed upon the following grounds. Since Auden has respected the spirit if not one of the rules of the form, and has observed its rules for rhyme and stanza, it may be assumed that it was not just any form he had in mind when composing the poem¹. Ringing the thematic changes in an orderly design coherently developed, even at the expense of formal refrains as observed in Auden's "Alone" suggests greater possibilities for significant expression than mere juxtaposition of correct refrains to tenuously connected stanzas, such as may be seen in Dobson's "A Voice in the Scented Night"². And the elimination of the verbal refrain is surely preferable to the doubtfully effective modified refrains of Davidson's villanelles³. Surely Saintsbury's recommendation of some licence in the rules applies here⁴, and the pre-Passerat history⁵ of the form bears witness to the possibility of having a recognizable villanelle without the strict observance of the post-Passerat rules.

Of course, Auden was quite able to follow the rules closely, and in his next villanelle, he reverts to the traditional form, even the subject of which seems more traditional. Time is the theme, as in so many of the earlier villanelles, but instead of the 'carpe diem' or 'carpe florem' approach, this villanelle reflects on the inability of time or experience to do more than tell us of the past and inculcate prudence about the future:

¹See The Dyer's Hand, pp. 67-69 for Auden's comments on the reconciliation of the demands of the verbal system or form with those of the idea of a poem.

²See above, p. 51.

³See above, p. 69.

⁴See above, p. 82.

⁵See above, p. 10 et seq.

Villanelle

Time can say nothing but I told you so,
Time only knows the price we have to pay;
If I could tell you, I would let you know.

If we should weep when clowns put on their show,
If we should stumble when musicians play,
Time can say nothing but I told you so.

There are no fortunes to be told, although
Because I love you more than I can say,
If I could tell you, I would let you know.

The winds must come from somewhere when they blow,
There must be reasons why the leaves decay;
Time can say nothing but I told you so.

Perhaps the roses really want to grow,
The vision seriously intends to stay;
If I could tell you, I would let you know.

Suppose the lions all get up and go,
And all the brooks and soldiers run away?
Time can say nothing but I told you so;
If I could tell you, I would let you know.¹

The refrains are well suited to the theme: I told you so, and I would tell you if I could. The repetition of these refrains throughout the poem stresses the futility of what time has to offer in the way of prophecy of advice. After the presentation of the theme in the first stanza, the second tercet gives a first example of the inadequacy of hindsight: after a mistaken response or a failure in performance, experience tells us only that we should have been more careful. Stanza three stands somewhat apart from the other middle tercets by dwelling on the inability of love to overcome the limitations of time, and a nice ambiguity appears in the final line of the third stanza. "If I could

¹Auden, Collected Shorter Poems, p. 201.

tell you I would let you know", relating to the fortune-telling of the first line of the stanza, expresses one kind of mutism; in connection with "I love you more than I can say" (Line 8), it expresses quite a different disability: the refrain can refer to ignorance of the future or the inability to express one's love.

The last three stanzas of the poem are similar to the second tercet in presenting instances of time's inability to do more than record phenomena or experience. In stanza four, natural phenomena must have a cause, but their recurrence does not reveal it. In stanza five, the poet speculates about the volition of evanescent things to remain, but the speculation is inconclusive. The speculation continues into the quatrain to apply to the probable or improbable, things sudden, usual or not unheard of: lions suddenly departing, brooks running, soldiers deserting. Usually in the quatrain, the poet brings the lesson home, or summarizes the unifying idea of the middle tercets, but here Auden persists in presenting examples, and only in the last two lines do the refrains recur to sum up the idea of the poem, the limitations of time and the futile willingness of the speaker.

This villanelle exhibits the more traditional structural pattern of the villanelle, the invariable refrains, the opening tercet expressing its themes, middle tercets loosely linked and expressing variations, and the reiterated themes in the quatrain. In this poem, Auden has tuned the I-told-you-so tedium of the refrains to advantage to express the inadequacy of hindsight. John Fuller sees in this villanelle an "Empsonian flatness" that "leans towards the lyrical" and "is not in places far removed from the kind of sentiment found in popular commercial song",¹. Only Fuller's

¹Fuller, p.

reference to "popular commercial song" makes any sense of this poem's "leaning towards the lyrical" if Fuller is referring to the triteness of the lyrics of so many songs in the seventh decade of this century.

Significantly different from "Villanelle" is Auden's third villanelle, Miranda's reveries in "The Sea and the Mirror", sub-titled "A Commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest". This work consists of a series of poems, concluding with a prose address by Caliban, on themes suggested by Shakespeare's play. The villanelle is a poem in the second part of the work, in which a number of characters from the play reflect on the change wrought in them by the events of the play and on the kind of life they expect to lead henceforth. Only Antonio's speech shows him to be virtually unchanged by events. For the other characters Auden uses a variety of verse forms, among them a sonnet, a ballade, a sestina, and, significantly for this study, a villanelle for Miranda:

Miranda

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 the 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.¹

For Miranda, the great change brought about by the events of the play has been her love for Ferdinand and his love for her. Hitherto alone on the island, with no peer in youth or beauty to reflect her own humanity, she has been like a mirror with no one to reflect, knowing no woman's face but her own². The whole villanelle centres on this paradoxical simile, and the chief refrain, "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely", constantly recalls this paradoxical simile as Miranda reflects on the past and future³. One critic draws attention to the fairy-tale quality of the mirror image and to the "aesthetic pleasure" characteristic of Miranda's thought:

Miranda's villanelle expresses her certainty of love in terms of fairy-tales, as Ferdinand had done in terms of striving for a vision of the Logos, Ferdinand is hers 'as mirrors are lonely' in the sense that Ferdinand's eyes are more attractive mirrors for her, so that her looking-glass will no longer reflect her image, and was even lonely when she used it, for it could not see itself in her eyes as Ferdinand can. The conceit is a familiar one in Elizabethan poetry, and its uses as a refrain enforces

¹W.H. Auden, Collected Longer Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 223.

²William Shakespeare, "The Tempest", Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed., G.B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948). p. 1489, III, i, lines 48-50.

³This mirror image also recalls lines in John Donne's "The Canonization": "Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove/Into the glasses of your eyes;/So made such mirrors and such spies,/That they did all to you epitomize". The Poems of John Donne, ed. Herbert J.C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 14.

what the other images also propose, that her love is largely an aesthetic pleasure ('O brave new world') and is expressive of a magical harmony ('children in a circle dancing').¹

Two other critics bear witness to the skill and care exercised by Auden in composing this poem. For the first critic, this had even led to closer appraisal of the character of Miranda:

Miranda's villanelle, sometimes said to be a charming song of touching innocence, is nothing of the sort. The language in this intricate contrivance is hardly that of an innocent whose discourse falls accidentally into poetry: "her venomous body/Melted into light". (Lines 7, 8). Nor is the speech at all straightforward ("My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely") or unself-conscious and unliterary ("As the poor and sad are real to the good king". (Line 2). The poem seems completely successful, but the speaker is not Shakespeare's Miranda by a long way, or an ingenuous country lass stumbling on the world. It is Auden as Poet, a highly learned, highly proficient, highly articulate Poet, putting on an extremely skillful exhibition in a game with very difficult rules. The Poet speaks not as Miranda, but as Miranda might speak could she analyze and conceptualize her emotions, realize her unrealized innocence, carefully silhouette herself against the wide world she does not know, and clearly articulate all these in an extremely sophisticated manner completely foreign to her. The entire poem is a wonderfully successful illusion. If Miranda really spoke in character she would sound much more like Trinculo than like the villanelle-speaking persona in her own poem. ²

Replogle raises the issue of the degree to which the skill required to compose a villanelle should be interpreted as a sign of uncharacteristic intelligence or sophistication on the part of the character speaking the villanelle³. For this study it is interesting to note Replogle's implied

¹ Fuller, p. 161.

² Justin Replogle, Auden's Poetry (London: Methuen and Co., 1969), p. 154.

³ Miranda's comments may appear less strange if close attention is paid to references to "The Tempest" in her villanelle. See below, p.111.

acceptance of the villanelle as the vehicle for such "an extremely skillful exhibition in a game with very difficult rules".

That Auden was aware of such difficulty is evinced by the manuscript of the poem as described by one critic in reference to Auden's craftsmanship: "In the case of Miranda's villanelle, once he [Auden] was sure of the form, he sketched the requirements of repetition in the margin of his writing in order to test alternative phrases"¹. The form of the poem would thus seem to have made a significant contribution to what Auden was using it to express.

Little attention seems to have been paid to the references to "The Tempest" contained in Miranda's villanelle, and before considering the form of this villanelle, these references deserve examination so that their contribution to the organic development of the poem may more clearly be seen.

No "high green hill" (Line 3) is mentioned in "The Tempest", but its recurrence in a refrain may be seen to reflect Miranda's consciousness of her island home, fertile and always beckoning to visitors. One critic sees the green hill as symbolizing the "stable, enduring and fruitful 'brave new world' into which she is entering", with the other refrain "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely" (Line 1) as suggesting "not only the egotism of mirror-gazing, but also the mirror which art holds up to nature"². This interpretation is countenanced by Auden's own comments

¹John G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 147 n.

²George W. Balke, The Later Auden: From "New Year Letter" to About the House (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 107.

on the symbolism of mirrors as expressions of one's personality¹. The green hill beside the sea is a good image of Miranda herself, and supplements the more artificial one of the mirror in line one of the poem. The second line of the first tercet may be seen as a reference to Prospero's awareness, expressed in Act I, of having neglected his kingly duty in his pursuit of knowledge, the original cause of his misfortunes².

Miranda still has enough of the innocence of childhood to "project a child's world in which figures from Shakespeare's play, Caliban, Sycorax, and Gonzalo, are transformed into fairy-tale characters, the Black Man, the Witch, and the Ancient"³. However, the second and third stanzas may refer to the story of Caliban's mother, Sycorax, the witch upon whom the Devil begot Caliban⁴, and although the "Black Man" referred to might be Caliban, the name is traditional for the Devil, and the security of Miranda's and Ferdinand's love might be contrasted with the ephemeral union of Sycorax and the Devil, productive of such ugliness as Caliban's. The witch's squawk (line 7) may refer to Sycorax's "unmitigable rage" when she confined Ariel in a cloven pine⁵, but the witch died and was absorbed by the island, the suggestion being perhaps that this magical island, inhabited by good spirits⁶, encompassed her death; the witch is gone and the island remains.

¹Auden, The Dyer's Hand, p. 93 et seq.

²Shakespeare, The Tempest, I, ii, lines 89-91.

³Balke, loc. cit.

⁴Shakespeare, The Tempest, I, ii, lines 319-30.

⁵Ibid, I, ii, 276-77.

⁶Ibid, IV, i, 60 et seq.

From earlier events, presumably told to her by Prospero¹, Miranda's mind turns to more recent events in the play. The ancient in stanza four is "the good old lord Gonzalo"², who had provided for Prospero's and Miranda's escape, whose tears had "run down his beard like winter's drops"³ and who blesses the young couple in the last scene of the play. This reminds Miranda, in the poem, of the one who shared that blessing, and of her possession of his love, "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely" (Line 12). This refrain of the fourth stanza leads directly into the subject of the fifth stanza, Miranda's awakening to womanhood through Ferdinand's kisses, the effect of their love on the family quarrel and, in her eyes, on her brave new world. The first object upon which shone the sun of this new day are the sails of the ships which will bear everyone away from the island, since "the sun shone on sails" (Line 14). The refrain line following, "And the high green hill sits always by the sea" (Line 15) suggests a farewell to the island to be last seen by its green hill.

This interpretation is borne out by the first line of the quatrain, for here Miranda looks forward to remembering "our changing garden" (Line 16), for Ferdinand and her a Garden of Eden in which harmony was established and which they are now leaving for a less ideal world. The myth element in the quatrain should be noted: the island will be remembered like the fairy land in a child's dancing game and the colon introducing the concluding refrains lend them this quality of dancing game refrain. But

¹Shakespeare, The Tempest, I, ii, 34.

²Ibid, V, i, 14-15.

³Ibid, V, i, 16.

these refrains, "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,/And the high green hill sits always by the sea" (Lines 18, 19) again express the chief themes of the poem, Miranda's reminding herself of what she is gaining by leaving this place for Ferdinand's world, and the final refrain suggesting her lingering regret for her childhood home.

The villanelle expresses Miranda's memories and reflections presented in associative rather than strictly chronological order, her first reminiscence referring to a time before the time of the play, the quatrain looking to the future from a vantage point at the end of the play.

The general tone of this villanelle is less detached and ratio-cinative than that of Auden's two earlier villanelles, since a more emotional reaction is being expressed in it. The more lyrical quality of the poem permits a looser association of the refrains with their respective stanzas without going so far as to transform them into mere exclamations, as was the case in Wilde's "Pan"¹. This relative looseness of structure is compensated for in part by the references to The Tempest woven into the fabric of the poem.

Of Auden's three villanelles, "Alone" is the most significant for this study by its substitution of thought refrain for verbal refrain, thus endowing the villanelle form with a new, more adaptable form of refrain. All three villanelles significantly develop the trend towards more serious subject matter initiated in English by Robinson, the villanelle "Miranda" combining serious thought with more lyrical elements.

¹See above, p. 56.

The "Empsonian flatness" referred to in connection with Auden's "Villanelle"¹ leads to the study of villanelles by William Empson which may also be seen to contribute significantly to the new tradition of the serious villanelle. Empson has written three villanelles, two of which afford matter for discussion germane to this study. The following villanelle, by its imagery and refrains represents a significant development in the use of the form:

Missing Dates

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills,
It is not the effort nor the failure tires,
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is not your system or clear sight that mills
Down small to the consequence a life requires;
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

They bled an old dog dry yet the exchange rills
Of young dog blood gave but a month's desires;
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the Chinese tombs and the slag hills
Usurp the soil, and not the soil retires.
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

Not to have fire is to be a skin that shrills.
The complete fire is death. From partial fires
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the poems you have lost, the ills
From missing dates, at which the heart expires.
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills. 2

About the meaning of the title, "Missing Dates", Empson's comment is related as follows: "When he reads this poem and speaks of it, Empson

¹See above, p. 107.

²William Empson, Collected Poems (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p. 60.

usually denies that 'missing dates' had for him any real connection with the true, frustratedly amatory, meaning of the phrase; he was using it only to mean appointments that fell through, opportunities missed"¹. The title refers to a culminating example of the theme of the poem presented at its climax in the quatrain.

It is proposed, in discussing this poem, first to outline its structure before presenting a closer analysis of stanzas and general characteristics. The first tercet expresses in its first and third lines the theme of destruction-dealing pollution in its most general human manifestation, with an example of a spurious cause of decline being presented in the second line. Each of the following four tercets contrasts in its first two lines a spurious or inadequate factor with a destructively pollutive agent, the examples being taken in turn from the life of body and mind, from medicine, from soil usage and from the symbolism of fire, with the refrain of each tercet relating its example to the prototypal example of the first tercet. The series of examples culminates in the most telling and personal example of destructive pollution for the poet, expressed with greater detail in the first two lines of the quatrain, and doubly emphasized by the concluding refrains, this ultimate example explaining the significance of the title and, in retrospect, giving a new dimension of meaning to the series of preceding examples and thus adding to a poem of general significance the impact of a personal and particular application.

¹Christopher Ricks, "Empson's Poetry", William Empson: The Man and His Work, ed., Roma Gill (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 202.

In the opening tercet, two elements which make demands upon body and mind, "effort" and "failure" (Line 2) are discounted as the true cause of death: "the poison (which fills) the whole blood stream" (Line 1) and which constitutes "the waste (which remains and kills" (Line 3). This prototypal example of killing pollution will be repeatedly referred to in the refrains throughout the poem, and this choice of subject, a phenomenon as universally and closely associated with life and death as the cleansing function of the circulation of the blood, greatly enhances the metaphorical suggestiveness and variety of overtone achieved by the refrains when associated with the various other examples of destructive pollution in the poem. Thus, "waste" associated with "effort or "failure" in tercet one has a connotation different from the "waste" not overcome by transfusion in tercet three, the "waste" of partial fires" in tercet five, or the "waste" from "poems you have lost" in the quatrain. Similarly, the slowness of the "poison" (Line 1) is not the same as the slowness of the "system that mills down small" (Lines 4, 5), of spreading "tombs" or "slag hills" (Line 10) or of the accumulation of "the ills from missing dates", though all represent an inexorable process. The universality and consequent adaptability of the subject of these refrains may be compared in this respect with the much narrower connotation of the refrains in Wilde's "Pan"¹ or the variable vagueness of Davidson's refrains in "The Unknown"².

¹See above, p. 56.

²See above, p. 71.

To be noted, finally, in the refrains of "Missing Dates" is the complementary nature of their sound and rhythm, the broken rhythm suggestive of anguish in the repetition of "The waste remains, the waste remains and kills" (Line 3) contrasting with the inexorable rhythmic flow of the first refrain line: "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills", enhanced by its repeated l's and o's and suggestive of accumulation. Throughout the poem, this contrast in rhythm and sound of two refrains having the same subject, suggests the destructive process of pollution accompanied by anguished awareness of the process.

The second tercet discounts the exercise of body or mind, "your system or clear sight" (Line 4) as a means of destructive reduction, the refrain recalling the real cause of destruction: "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills" (Line 6).

The third tercet presents an example from experimental medicine, blood transfusion between dogs, as an example of a futile attempt to thwart the true cause of destruction, "the waste" that "remains and kills" (Line 9). One critic has commented on this "cruel parody of begetting (the generations the wrong way round, moreover), as "a month's desires" (Line 7) suggests -- and how long is a month to a dog?"¹. The reference here is to the example of a young dog giving life to an old dog, whereas it is usually the parent who gives life to the offspring.

In the fourth stanza, the examples extend in time and space: from antiquity and far away, the example is presented of "Chinese tombs"

¹Ricks, p. 203.

gradually usurping arable land, just as modern, industrial tombs, "slag hills" (Line 10) do. The nourishing soil remains, as does the blood in our body, but "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills" (Line 12) just as "tombs" and "slag hills/Usurp the soil" (Lines 10, 11).

From the specific examples of preceding tercets, the poet turns to the more abstract symbol of fire in stanza five. "Not to have fire" (Line 13) is not to be consumed at all by love, ambition, desire or the poetic urge, and thus to be merely "a skin that shrills" (Line 13), with only a voice and no inner personality left. This may be a desirable state as suggested by Empson's epigraph for the Collected Poems, Gautama the Buddha's Fire Sermon¹, the central tenet of which is that to be empty of desire leads to the bliss of non-being. In contrast, "the complete fire is death" (Line 14) presents the opposite case, total consumption and commitment, to die to everything but the fire². Both extremes represent viable philosophies, but "From partial fires . . . the waste remains and kills" (Lines 14, 15), these partial fires representing unspent effort, thwarted desire or creativity.

In the quatrain, the poet turns to the example of his personal experience, generalized somewhat by the use of the impersonal "you", in "It is the poems you have lost, the ills/From missing dates" (Lines 16, 17),

¹Empson, Collected Poems, p. 1.

²This complete fire "recalls Pater's "hard, gemlike flame", The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry (New American Library, 1959), p. 158. More generally in this tercet, the Buddhist flight from desire may be contrasted with the submersion of self in the fire of the Christian desire for God.

the climax of the series of examples. The direct address of "you" is also a more personal form of utterance, and the juxtaposition of "poems you have lost," the ill's "From missing dates" recalls the title of the poem in connection with what for a poet would be the most significant form of killing waste, a waste that is not merely weakening but one "at which the heart expires" (Line 17). In all the other examples of pollution, none seems to have been more basic than the blood pollution of the first tercet: but the pollution suggested by "the poems you have lost, the ill's/From missing dates" kills even the heart which makes the blood circulate. No contrast of this deadly pollution with a spurious one is presented in the quatrain: the four lines consistently suggest destruction, so that the quatrain may be seen to relate to the rest of the poem in a manner analogous to the way each refrain relates to its tercet, and just as each refrain reminded the reader of the true cause of destruction, so the quatrain suggests to the reader that the destructive pollution it describes is paramount for the poet, thus causing him to re-examine in retrospect the relationship of this supreme example with the other examples of pollution presented in the poem.

In the light of the significance of "the poems you have lost", the title "Missing Dates" now assumes a more specific connotation, opportunities missed for creating poems. The "effort" and "failure" [which] "tires" (Line 2) now suggests failed attempts at poetic creation, the "waste" of which, both futility and residue, may clog and kill inspiration. In the second tercet, it is not the exercise of insight or poetic craft to make life intelligible that wears, "mills" (Line 4) away the poet, but the poison from creative missing dates. In the third tercet,

the old dog of a poet may borrow new tricks and ideas from younger dogs, but such initiative is short lived, "a month's desires" (Line 8), and the waste from missing dates goes on. In the fourth tercet, "Chinese tombs" may now be taken to symbolize preoccupation with dead forms and conventions, "slag hills" may be seen to represent capitulation to current fad, both usurping the fertile soil of creative endeavour. In tercet five, the fireless "skin that shrills" may represent the scribbling of verse without anything to say, the "complete fire" idle conception without the courage to express poetic insight, from the point of view of the creative act, both incomplete, and from such "partial fires . . . the waste remains and kills" (Line 12).

Reading the first two lines of the quatrain, "It is the poems you have lost, the illls/From missing dates at which the heart expires" without relating them to the rest of the poem and to its title, may have contributed to the perplexity of one critic who remarks that "it is impossible to feel that when 'the poems' suddenly surface at the end they can really be thought of as carrying much of the gravity of the poem. I like the oddity of their sudden intervention, but I think it important that they should seem so desolatingly much smaller than the dark intimations of this poem itself"¹. The validity of the comment would seem to obtain only if the line in question is read somewhat in isolation. The direct address of "you have lost" (Line 16) is also criticised as symptomatic of a more general weakness in the poem:

¹Ricks, p. 202.

Yet I don't think that "Missing Dates" is clear to itself about the consequence this poem requires. Perhaps because it is the poem which most raises to a glare the two focuses (upon life as dark and upon life as the creation of light); perhaps because it so completely lacks a sense of anybody or anything else addressed, whether a tree, a general audience or a person -- it self-communes as no other poem of Empson's does, its you a desolating vacancy; perhaps because it allows so little room to Empson's humour, whether sardonic or affectionate; perhaps because its refrains concur as hammer - blows rather than converging as pincers: at any rate I find that it presents a mind troubled like a fountain stirred, and the poem itself sees not the bottom of it. ¹

Perhaps the critic here has failed to notice that the "consequence" of the poem is clearly shown by its application to the poet's own state as suggested by "the poems you have lost" (Line 16), and that it is more the self-communicating than the self-communing quality of the poem which enables it to express the condition both of creative man and of the creative poet.

In "Missing Dates", the refrains both point to the same idea; in "Villanelle", the other of Empson's villanelles to be examined in this study, the refrains are more antithetical:

Villanelle

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 purged 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.

¹Ricks, p. 203.

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. ¹

The first and last lines of the opening tercet establish the contrasting themes of the poem: remembered pain balanced by achieved poise suggestive of self-control, the cause of the pain being described in the second line, "You chemic beauty burned my muscles through", with respect both to the depth and to the nature of the wound. As in the second refrain of "Missing Dates", "The waste remains, the waste remains and kills", a pause in the first refrain of "Villanelle " suggests anguish, here the intensity of the pain in "It is the pain, it is the pain endures" (Line 1). Thus, the first tercet relates the still felt pain (Line 1), the occasion of the wound (Line 2), and the remembered external calm of both persons involved in "Poise of my hands reminded me of yours" (Line 3). The basic image of the poem is that of an illness or wound (first tercet) with its attendant infection culminating in its secondary phase (middle tercets and quatrain). As the background to this development, there is the enduring pain (Line 1, first refrain) and the remembered calm (Line 3, second refrain).

¹Empson, Collected Poems, p. 22.

Once again, Empson makes use of scientific knowledge, especially in the area of medicine. "Deep toxin" (Line 4) refers both to the depth of the wound and to the poisoning in cases of severe burns, and thus links the second tercet with "chemic beauty burned" of the first. "Deep" referring to toxin suggests that the wound appears healed on the surface, though the pain endures, not removed by the old salve of the first healing. The medical imagery connects the second tercet with the third, the toxin now become "infection" (Line 7). This infection is now dormant, "infection slept" (Line 7), and the speaker explains the nature of its dormancy in parentheses: "(custom or change inures)" (Line 7). But the speaker is aware of the nature of the disease and knows he must expect more pain in the secondary phase after the period of dormancy, "when pain's secondary phase was due" (Line 8), and has steeled himself for its onslaught as he had done before: "Poise of my hands reminded me of yours" (Line 9).

In the fourth tercet, the poet reflects on his momentary sense of security during the dormant period: "How safe I felt . . . your grace safely by heart I knew" (Lines 10, 11), though still reminded by the enduring pain (Line 12). But his "stare drank deep beauty that still allures" (Line 13), which explains and recalls the "chemic beauty" of line two, as the "deep toxin" of line four. Line fourteen explains the continuing action causing the enduring pain: "My heart pumps yet the poison draught of you". But external calm is ever maintained: "Poise of my hands reminded me of yours". The subdued metaphor of tercet five points to the reality behind the wound imagery: in common speech, the poet has 'her' in his blood, and his heart is still active with her

presence. Empson here continues the medical imagery but provides a transition to description of the relationship in the first two lines of the quatrain.

The poet switches from past to present tense in the quatrain, suggesting perhaps that the "secondary phase" (Line 8) is taking place. The carrier of infection is "still kind" (Line 16), "Kind and beyond adieu" (Line 17) so that the infection appears to be permanent, this love not to be dismissed by a conventional lovers' adieu. This repeated reference to kindness recalls a similar "kindness" (Line 5) at the onset of the affliction. "Whom the same shape immures" (Line 16) suggests a continuation of the medical imagery, an appealing carrier for a deadly disease. The reiterated topic of kindness in the first two lines of the quatrain emphasized a greater degree of emotional attachment. "We miss our cue", which ends line seventeen, suggests that it is time that habitual roles be resumed, and the concluding refrains, "It is the pain, it is the pain endure./Poise of my hands reminded me of yours", reiterate the themes of the poem, enduring pain and outward calm.

With respect to the villanelle form of the poem, the complementary nature of the refrains should be noted, together with their organic relationship to the developing medical imagery of the poem. In contrast to the series of variations presented in the middle tercets of "Missing Dates", Empson has here adopted a more developmental pattern, not only for the middle tercets, but for the entire poem. Nor has he been content to let the refrains carry the burden of formally linking together the parts of the poems, but has enhanced the organic unity of the poem by a

more closely sustained pattern of imagery, involving the use of synonyms, "poison", "toxin", "infection", and repetition, "kindness", "kind", "chemical beauty", "deep beauty".

In "Missing Dates" and "Villanelle"¹, Empson's contribution to the development of the villanelle may be seen to have, by his example, fostered the use of the form for serious utterance, to have further demonstrated the effectiveness of refrains complementary in sense, sound and rhythm and to have shown with what effect for the intensity of the whole poem refrains may variously be integrated into the fabric of a villanelle.

The examination of "Villanelle" leads to the study of Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night", but it is another work by Thomas which provides the literary link. In his biography by Thomas, Constantine Fitzgibbon records the composition of a satire on William Empson published in 1942 in the July edition of Horizon under the "odd subtitle of 'Homage to William Empson'"².

¹Empson's third villanelle, "Reflections from Anita Loos", Collected Poems, p. 66, was suggested to him by a passage in Loos' novel, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), as related by Empson, but in its looser structure and less well integrated refrains, offers little matter for this study. (Ibid., p. 114). See Appendix, p. 202.

²Constantine Fitzgibbon, The Life of Dylan Thomas (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 276.

Request to Leda
Homage to William Empson

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.¹

Thomas omitted this poem from his Collected Poems², but Daniel Jones, Thomas' old friend and the editor of Dylan Thomas: The Poems³ included it in that collection, and fortunately so, for the poem consists of three tercets in the villanelle form, with two rhymes and two refrain lines. On the sole basis of the Horizon publication, the ten other lines it would have taken for the poem to attain regular villanelle length might have been thought missing because of a misprint. One critic's reference to this poem as "a composition in the same form as "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night""⁴ also leads the reader to expect the regular nineteen-line villanelle. Since Empson's "Villanelle" was first published in 1928⁵, it was possible for Thomas to have read it, so that when the occasion presented itself for a parody, the villanelle form may have

¹Dylan Thomas, "Request to Leda: Homage to William Empson", Horizon, 6, No. 31 (July 1942), p. 6.

²Dylan Thomas, The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas (New York: New Directions, 1953).

³Dylan Thomas, Dylan Thomas: The Poems, ed., Daniel Jones (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1971), p. 159.

⁴Derek Stanford, Dylan Thomas: A Literary Study (London: Neville Spearman Limited, 1964), p. 117.

⁵William Empson: The Man and his Work, p. 215.

occurred to Thomas. More specific evidence of Thomas' having seen "Villanelle" may be seen in Thomas' use of the word "chemic" (Line 7), hardly a word in ordinary usage, which appears in the secondary line of Empson's "Villanelle"¹. In "Request to Leda" the phrase "Desire is phosphorous (Line 7) is seen as referring to "Empson's tendency, both in verse and prose, to convert entities and sensuous abstractions into abstract or scientific constituents"². Empson's "Villanelle" may be seen as a fair example of this tendency. Similarly, the second refrain of "Request to Leda", "The worm is (pin-point) rational in the fruit" (Line 3), is seen as a satiric comment on "Empson's exacting word-for-word exegesis", and the parenthesis as a similar satire on Empson's use of brackets³. The first line of Empson's "Villanelle" affords an example of this practice⁴. Finally, as will be seen below, Thomas's poem is allusively recondite, and this may be a further point of satire.

"Request to Leda" is a treatment of the myth of Leda and the Swan⁵. The Swan, of course, is Zeus who in various guises enjoyed the favours of sundry female humans⁶. The "Request" to Leda appears to be that she should be patient despite her "winged lust" (Line 1), for reasons which form the subject of the ensuing lines. In the first line,

¹See above, p. 122.

²Stanford, p. 117, n.

³Loc. cit.

⁴See above, p. 122.

⁵Publius Ovidius Naso, Metamorphoseon, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), VI, line 109, p. 294. See also W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan & Co., 1933), p. 241.

⁶Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), II, pp. 190-206.

Leda is advised that her divine lover must change both his form and his form of wooing, "his (lust) must now change suit" (Line 1), "suit" being taken in two of its meanings, solicitation and garment. In his swan form, the celestial Casanova, "harp-waked" (Line 2) has a limited range as the noun "rake", the verb "rake" also meaning to fly along after game or to sweep with shot. As a swan, physiological necessity limits the range of his sexual prowess. The final line of this tercet "The worm is (pin-point) rational in the fruit" (Line 3) adduces natural law: the worm makes sense in, is commensurate to the fruit it enjoys, but a swan in a woman is another matter, which explains why Casanova Zeus must change suit.

The second stanza continues the advice to Leda: it is up to Zeus impregnator, "(gourd being man)" (Line 4) to leave his abode in the swan and change form, and not up to her to "change root" (Line 4). Nor should Leda be too impressed by Zeus' metamorphosis, "taking no plume for index in love's change" (Line 5), since a bird can fly away. The parenthetical explanation recalls Empson's similar explanation in "Villanelle"¹.

In the last tercet of "Request to Leda", there is a touch of scientific language, where Thomas uses "phosphorous" (Line 7) for 'phosphorescent', the implication being that Leda need not worry, loving Zeus will find her even in the dark. "Bruit" (Line 7) is not only noise, but report and fame, and Leda's fame will suffice to draw Zeus to her;

¹See above, p. 122.

conversely, his own fame as a lover should prompt him to seek her out. Desire in the chemistry of sex is likened to amplifying electricity, "chémic bruit/Lust bears" (Lines 7, 8), and although we may not at first understand the strangeness of the worm, one in the fruit, it will be "(pin-point) rational", and act according to its nature. Stanford also sees phallic imagery in this worm¹.

The importance of this poem for this study lies in the evidence it provides of Thomas' having read Empson's "Villanelle", and by the composition of this poem, of being acquainted with the villanelle form. Thus, he was aware of the capacity of the villanelle form to serve as a vehicle for the expression of serious thought, and his experience with the form will have introduced him to its difficulties.

Thomas' villanelle "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" was first published in Botteghe Oscure VIII in November, 1951², and Daniel Jones dates its composition at May, 1951, quoting a letter from Thomas to Princess Caetani of May 28th in which the poem was enclosed and in which Thomas recommended that it be printed with his longer poem, "Lament" on the same subject. Of particular interest is the postscript to this letter in which Thomas adds: "The only person I can't show the little enclosed poem to is, of course, my father, who doesn't know he's dying"³. Of more significance for the poem than its date of composition is Fitzgibbon's comment that before his death, David Thomas had become a

¹Stanford, p. 117, n.

²Ralph Maud, Entrances to Dylan Thomas' Poetry (Lowestoft, Suffolk: Scorpion Press, 1963), p. 141.

³Thomas, Dylan Thomas: The Poems, p. 275.

semi-invalid, that he was losing his eyesight, and "that the spectacle of his decline distressed Dylan greatly and inspired one of his last poems, 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night'"¹. In an earlier passage, the same biographer had remarked that Dylan's father's death "was to be the event that probably upset him most in all his short life; and it is perhaps significant that he dies less than a year after his father"².

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

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. ³
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

In this poem, Thomas follows the more traditional pattern of the villanelle: an opening tercet containing the principal and related themes, middle tercets presenting variations incorporating illustrations

¹Fitzgibbon, p. 334.

²Ibid., p. 122

³Thomas, Collected Poems, p. 128.

or applications of the themes, and in the quatrain, a final and more immediately personal application of the themes.

The first and last lines of the opening tercet are two complementary imperatives addressed to his father, connected by a second line in which the reason for such imperatives is stated. The instigation to revolt in this tercet, which contrasts with the more frequently encountered themes of resignation and serenity in poems addressed to the dying, has been commented upon by one critic: "To find in a villanelle a dying man raging, burning, raving -- or being exhorted to it by a wild man -- is not a little shocking"¹. The increasingly violent tone of the tercet should be noted, from the relative calm of "Do not go gentle into that good night" to the rising tension of "burn and rave" (Line 2), to the anguished cry of "Rage, rage" (Line 3)².

¹Clark Emery, The World of Dylan Thomas (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1971), p. 54.

²William York Tindall, in A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), p. 204, sees in "Rage, rage" an echo of W.B. Yeats' poem, "The Choice". Collected Poems, p. 278, the first stanza of which contains the line referred to:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

If Thomas' "Rage, rage" contains an allusion to this stanza, especially to its last line, the allusion is appropriate in presenting yet another reason for David Thomas not to give in to death but to prefer "perfection of the work". But David Thomas was long since retired, and "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" is about the very act of dying; and the link between the two poems, resting on the word "rage" seems tenuous.

The play of sound and meaning in this first tercet exhibits considerable contrast enhancing the complementary nature of the refrains and reminiscent of Empson's use of sound and rhythm in "Villanelle"¹. The even rhythm, punctuated by the alliterative g's, and the short vowels of "Do not go gentle into that good night" contrast with the slower rhythm and longer vowels of "rage" and "dying" in "Rage, rage against the dying of the light". In this line, the two strong opening beats of "Rage, rage" dwindle in the imitative harmony of "against the dying of the light" to echo the meaning of the line. A paradox is suggested in the opening line by "gentle" and "good": if the night is "good", why should not one "go gentle"? The answer is to be found in the middle tercets, and Thomas thus affords a classic example of the opening tercet being used to introduce themes and provide the basis for the development of the poem. The opening line also presents a subtle warning of the rather unorthodox appeal made in the poem by the use of the adjective "gentle" instead of the grammatical 'gently' in "Do not go gentle into that good night". This substitution suggests a double reference, for David Thomas was a teacher of English, and by the time the old man died, "the pride and fire had almost all gone out of him"². This first grammatical licence is reinforced by the pun on "good night", both descriptive phrase and parting salutation.

In the last two lines of the first tercet, a parallel contrast is established between the action mentioned and its occasion: "burn and

¹See above, p. 122.

²Fitzgibbon, p. 334.

rage . . . at close of day" and "rage . . . against the dying".

Most effective as a basis for the development of the poem is the antithesis established between the verbs of the two refrains: "Do not go gentle . . . [but] Rage, rage". The concluding words of the two refrains, "night" and "light" further emphasize this antithesis, echoed throughout the poem by the rhyme which these two words establish.

In the middle tercets, four types of men, "wise", "good", "wild" and "grave", with their respective experience of life and death, are presented as illustrations of what the poet enjoins his father to avoid. The pattern of the second tercet repeats that of the first: apparent resignation in the first line leading to retraction in the following lines no longer separated by punctuation. "Dark" in "dark is right" (Line 4) has the same connotation as "night" in the first line, and since this second tercet is about "wise men" (Line 4), theirs is a philosophical approach suggested by the adjective "right" meaning inevitable or proper when applied to death, a rational view in "wise men at their end know dark is right" (Line 4)¹. But despite their philosophy, they are not

¹William Moynihan in The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 18/, considers the second line of this tercet, "Because their words had forked no lightning" to be the only literary echo in the poem, the suggested allusion being to Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", The Poetical Works of Lord Byron (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 223. In Canto III, stanzas 95-97, Byron describes a thunder storm in the mountains. Lines six and seven of stanza 95 read: "The brightest through these parted hills hath forked/His lightnings". Taken alone, such a reference might seem to have no more significance than Thomas' possible reference to Yeats' poem in "Request to Leda" (see above p. 127). But considered together with stanza 92, which could be assumed to be a possible reply on the part of David Thomas, the allusion becomes most appropriate, explaining why "wise men" whose "words had forked no lightning" do not go gentle, and suggesting why David Thomas, now become so quiet in his old age, who has lived and died unheard, should now rage:

resigned to the silence of the tomb, the refrain in this tercet now given in indicative rather than imperative mood.

From the wise men or philosophers, the poet turns to the good men, the saints, perhaps those who have renounced the world. The "last wave by" (Line 7) suggests the end of life, but taken with "a green bay" (Line 8) is suggestive of the natural world they may have renounced and which they now regret, since "the dying of the light" (Line 9) is the dying of the source of green life. "Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay" (Line 8) may imply that the deeds of these good men might have been the stronger for being performed in the natural world and been all the more "bright" (Line 7) as examples for their fellow men¹. In this stanza,

Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me, -- could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe -- into one word,
And that word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheating it as a sword.

Moynihan sees this stanza 92 as suggesting the natural course of the argument of Thomas's poetry, a course which he urges on his father but does not follow in the poem, since no reply from David Thomas is presented in the poem.

¹As suggested by Rushworth M. Kidder in Dylan Thomas: The Country of the Spirit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 189, n, if "green bay" (Line 8) refers to a bay tree, this might be an allusion to Psalm 37:35, The Holy Bible (New York: American Bible Society, 1937), p. 539: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." Thomas may infer that good men should also have spread themselves in their goodness and strengthened their "frail deeds" (Line 8) by not withdrawing, whether from the waters of life or the tree of growth.

the sense of frustration seems stronger because of the "crying" (Line 7) of the good men about what their deeds might have been, and then their rage against the loss of opportunity.

For "wild men" in tercet four, Thomas in the manuscript had first written "mad men"¹, but both terms may be seen to designate "men of action and lovers of living"², who too late become aware of the passage of time³. In this tercet it is interesting to observe Thomas' particular treatment of the 'carpe diem' theme which had been so frequently encountered in nineteenth century villanelles, though the bitter regret in Thomas' poem contrasts with the sweet sadness of the earlier villanelles. The two commas of "And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way" (Line 11) suggest a halting reluctance after the more sweeping rhythm of "Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight" (Line 9). The general tempo of the tercet is thus one of deceleration, which well suits the fate of wild men brought to a stop by death.

The pun of "grave men, near death" in tercet five is shocking enough to sharpen the reader's attention to the introduction of the theme of sight and blindness, a reference to David Thomas' weakening sight⁴, and possibly to poets⁵. This introduction of death, the pun in "grave"

¹Bill Read, The Days of Dylan Thomas: A Pictorial Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 148.

²Tindall, p. 205.

³There might also be an allusion here to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress", Major Poets of the Earlier Seventeenth Century, B.K. Lewalski and A.J. Sabol, eds. (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1973), p. 1090, in its concluding couplet. The hedonists referred to in tercet four of Thomas' poem grieve at not having been able to stop "the sun in flight" (Line 10).

⁴See above, p. 130.

⁵Tindall (p. 205) sees this example as the most important of all,

(Line 13) and blindness draws the poem closer to Thomas' own specific experience, his father dying.

In the quatrain, with "you" and "I", the poem reaches a more personal plane; after general deaths, the poem now focusses on the particular death, about to happen, of Dylan's father. The companion poem to this villanelle, the incomplete "Elegy" provides the most cogently descriptive comment on this villanelle¹. The phrase "on the sad height" (Line 16) has been interpreted to signify an enthronement of David Thomas, and although this interpretation might be consistent with the pleading tone of the concluding refrains of the poems, a more realistic interpretation would occur to anyone who had visited a hospital sick-room with its high beds. Yet, the poet does beseech his father to curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray", but this may also be a plea for any sign of recognition and life from one who is dying². This line also contains the only specific reference to religion in the poem, in "bless" and "pray", and it is "pray" which lends to the concluding refrains, "Do not go gentle into that good night/Rage, rage against the dying of the light" a tender, beseeching tone contrasting somewhat with the imperative and admonitory tone of the opening of the poem.

and that "Grave men" must be poets, with evident reference to Milton. He also sees "be gay" (Line 14) as a reference to Yeats' "Lapis Lazuli"; Collected Poems, p. 338, but does not explain how the tao of the Chinese sages in Yeats' poem can be reconciled with the rebellious "Rage, rage" (Line 15) of Thomas' poem.

¹See below, the Appendix, p. 203.

²The juxtaposed verbs, "curse, bless" (Line 17), besides echoing the "Rage, rage" of the refrain, also recall the series of verbs in the passage from Byron quoted earlier, see p.

In considering the villanelle qualities of the poem, the refrains are to be noted for their contribution to the organic unity of the poem, for the quality in them suggestive of a litany, and the various ways in which they become an integral part of their stanzas and yet enhance the general idea of the poem, providing it with its climax in the quatrain. Another form of repetition in the poem, that of recurrent terms such as "wise men", "good men", "wild men", "grave men", "And you my father", recalls Empson's practice of thus enhancing the unity of a poem by recurrent synonyms or repeated words¹. Another connective pattern element may be seen in the second line of the middle tercets, consistently used by Thomas to express the lesson learned too late, such regularity serving as a further link among the middle tercets. Throughout the poem, the rhythm of stanzas rises to the refrain "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" or slackens towards the refrain "Do not go gentle into that good night", until the complementary rhythms come together in the quatrain, as evinced by the poet's own reading of the poem².

An incidentally interesting aspect of this villanelle in connection with this study has been the reaction of certain critics to Thomas' use of the villanelle form to express his strong reaction to an event of the greatest personal significance to him. In such comment recur the old misconceptions and prejudices about the villanelle:

For all its charm, the villanelle has not been responsible for strong or forceful poems (one thinks of the artificial elegance and pathos of many of the poems

¹See above, p. 122.

²Dylan Thomas, Dylan Thomas Reading (New York: Caedmon Records Inc., 1952), I.

of the 'Eighties and 'Nineties who cultivated this form -- Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson, Edmond Gosse, Oscar Wilde, and others). But Thomas' poem is altogether forceful: it has much of the concentrated fury of expression which the poetry of the older Yeats contained, but reveals more tenderness and sympathy. ¹

This statement seems to be based exclusively on a reading of nineteenth century villanelles and on an indiscriminate grouping of poets who cultivated one or more of the French forms. Only Austin Dobson, from among the authors mentioned, can be said to have cultivated the villanelle, the others having written only two or three villanelles.

Another critic refers to the "tricky shape which pleased Stephen Dedalus and the poetic artificers of the 1880's", and adds that "Choosing a shape so artificial for a matter so close to heart is as much a conceit as springing the rhythm, even moderately, within so traditional a shape. Forms and their violations were his delights."² It is difficult to discern any way in which Thomas violated the villanelle form, the rules of which are as well observed by Thomas as by any English poet examined. The same critic invites comparison with Empson's "Villanelle" and recognizes that Thomas' poem "would not be half so moving without the ritualistic repetition that the form demands"³. Another critic shares Tindall's surprise at Thomas' use of the villanelle, and considers such use "a triumph of audacity to pour such intense feeling on so personal a subject into such a form as the villanelle", adding that feelings "of a certain poignance -- a gentle autumnal melancholy, say -- are what Austin Dobson

¹Stanford, p. 117.

²Tindall, p. 204.

³Ibid, p. 204.

and his fellow have led us to expect"¹. Finally, an editor friend of Thomas', without presuming to make adverse comments about Thomas's choice of form, remarks that it is "significant that for his subject and for this occasion, Thomas deliberately chose to discipline himself by the use of a strict form, the villanelle"².

After more than half a century of commentary on the villanelle, generally limited to scant praise of its charm and complexity, such references to its effectiveness and to its strictness as a form of discipline suggest a change of attitude in which poets such as Thomas have led the way towards an appreciation of the mature capacity of the villanelle.

After what might be considered the finest twentieth century villanelle in strictly traditional form, two villanelles by Theodore Roethke, "The Waking" and "The Right Thing" deserve examination in that they continue and develop the tradition of using the villanelle for more serious and even philosophical utterance exemplified by Auden and Empson; they also represent an important development in the use of the villanelle form.

"The Waking" (1953) is the last poem in a collection bearing the same name, and in the collection is preceded by a group of poems entitled "Four for Sir John Davies"³ in which the dance serves as a major source of

¹Emery, p. 54.

²Thomas, Dylan Thomas: The Poems, p. 274.

³See these poems in the Appendix, pp. 205-208 . Sir John Davies (1569-1626) is chiefly remembered for his poem Orchestra, or a Poeme of Dauncing , ed., E.M.W. Tillyard (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), a work with strong Democritean and Lucretian overtones in that the dance is seen

imagery connecting the poems which express reflections on the cyclical nature of the universe. "The Waking" contrasts with these poems by suggesting a turning away from such speculation as they express, towards acknowledgement of the limitations of the intellect and recognition of the primacy of intuition and subjective experience.

The Waking

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow,
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear,
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady, I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.¹

as the principle of life and nature, thus suggesting the Democritean atomic system. See W. Windelband, History of Ancient Philosophy, trans. H.E. Cushman (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), pp. 151-223, and Titus Lucretius Carus, De Rerum Natura, trad. A. Ernout (Paris: "Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres", 1955).

¹Theodore Roethke, The Waking: Poems 1933-1953 (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1953), p. 120.

In a letter to a Polish graduate student, Ludmila Marjanska, Roethke comments as follows on the meaning of the opening line of the poem: "To wake here means to be awakened into full awareness: a paradox that this wakening does partake of the nature of an eternal wakening."¹ This opening line may also be seen to refer to the most familiar cycle of life, that of waking and sleeping, and suggests a cautious acceptance of awareness leading to the calm stoicism expressed in "I feel my fate in what I cannot fear" (Line 2); the limitations of human knowledge and the function of intuition expressed in this line lead to the practical outlook expressed in "I learn by going where I have to go" (Line 3). There is an overtone of determinism in "where I have to go", but this is balanced by the personal initiative expressed in "I learn". The first and last lines of the tercet are complementary, the first giving both the physical coming to awareness and the broader awakening referred to by Roethke in his comment, and the third line giving the behavioural reason for the caution expressed in "take my waking slow", the reason being that awareness does not give wisdom, it provides only the possibility of its attainment. The middle line of the tercet, "I feel my fate in what I cannot fear" provides the instinctual and emotional element linking the coming to awareness expressed in the first line with the learning process expressed in the third line. As refrains, the first and third lines will provide for alternating emphasis on awareness and learning in the middle stanzas until these two elements, now more clearly related after the explorations of the

¹Theodore Roethke, Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke, ed., Ralph J. Mills, Jr., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 261.

middle tercets, are brought together in the concluding quatrain.

The middle tercets explore the implications of the process of awareness and learning by means of a combination of example and sequential development. Tercets two, three and four raise questions and suggest responses related to the theme of awareness and learning of the first tercet; tercet four brings the questioning to an end by questioning the validity of such enquiry. As the questioning process develops in these middle tercets, it is paralleled by a gradual departure from traditional villanelle form in the shape of more imperfect rhyming and modifications to the refrain dealing with learning, "I learn by going where I have to go", culminating in tercet five where both the questioning process and the breakdown of form come to an end. After this general description of the development of the tercets, a more detailed analysis of each of them can now be undertaken.

In the second tercet, "We" (Line 4) broadens the connotation of the first tercet into a more general application: the poet now refers to general, not individual experience. The two statements of line four, "We think by feeling. What is there to know?" epitomize the unifying idea of the first tercet and ask the question it raises. About this line, Roethke has commented:

This, in its essence, is a description of the metaphysical poet who thinks with his body: an idea can be as real as the smell of a flower or a blow on the head. And those so lucky as to bring their whole sensory equipment to bear on the process of thought, jump more frequently from one plateau to another more frequently.¹

¹Theodore Roethke, On the Poet and His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke, ed., Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 27.

The second part of this line, "What is there to know?", is both question and, as rhetorical question, a statement suggesting a priority in importance expressed in the following lines. The first answer, "I hear my being dance from ear to ear" (Line 5), refers to consciousness of self, as Roethke's comment on the line makes clear: "As far as I know this is not an idiomatic expression. It means that the being of the speaker does its own internal dance within the mind, within the brain."¹ The refrain referring to awareness, "I wake to sleep and take my waking slow" (Line 6) concludes the tercet which, taken as a whole, may thus be seen to emphasize the primacy of self-consciousness in the process of awareness.

From "I" and "We" in the first two tercets, the poet turns to "you" in the third, to the reader or person to whom the poem is addressed, with a question about the person's identity. "Of those so close beside me, which are you?" (Line 7) suggest that although we share the human condition and even some degree of proximity, affective or other, our knowledge of another is limited². In the next line, "God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there", the poet leaves speculation about others and returns to his own experience, expressing gratitude and respect for even the limited certainty of the common Ground, content, "And learn by going where I have to go" (Line 9), to accept whatever can be learned on this basis.

¹Roethke, Selected Letters, p. 262.

²Just as the emphasis on self-knowledge in tercet two recalls Descartes' "Je pense, donc je suis", Discours de la Méthode (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1937), p. 47, so in tercet three the reference to a personal relationship as a source of doubt recalls and contrasts with the last stanza of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach", in The Poetical Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 210.

But even if "Ground", taken literally, is the basis of our certitude, as stanza four suggests, our knowledge is limited. To illustrate this, the poet presents an unexpected approach to the mystery of growth from the Ground: "Light takes the tree" (Line 10) suggests an alternate explanation of growth. This novel approach is paralleled in the rhyming, where the word 'grow' might have been expected in a line about growth, Roethke uses the slant-rhyme of "how". As the poet's questioning develops, the tercets become less coherent: the associative link between the first and second lines of tercet three had been tenuous; the association is even weaker in tercet four, and the allusions become more recondite. The humility of "I shall walk softly there" (Line 8), is stressed even more by "The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair" (Line 11)¹.

The questions of tercets two, three and four having led only to an acceptance of the limitations they suggest, the process of questioning culminates in tercet five, where the very validity of such enquiry is questioned. Nature does not exist to be an object of man's knowledge, "Great Nature had another thing to do to you and me" (Line 13). The speculation ends here, awareness and learning must come together in "so take the lively air,/And, lovely, learn by going where to go" (Lines 14, 15)². The three lines of the tercet are almost exactly bisected, the first

¹This use of animal imagery is consistent with Roethke's poetic practice. The "worm" may be seen to represent the poet, as in Roethke's poem "The Manifestation", The Far Field (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 71, where the worm is described as "the intrepid scholar of the soil". "A winding stair" in "The Waking" may be seen as a reference to purgatory mentioned in "The Vigil", the fourth of "Four for Sir John Davies" (see Appendix, p. 208), suggesting that the poet accepts the want of any greater revelation, though still climbing and accepting the cycle in which he finds himself.

²These last lines of tercet five recall the "wise passiveness" of Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply", The Poems of William Wordsworth

half suggesting the futility of speculation, the second half suggesting the simple living that may take the place of speculation. The internal slant rhyme of "lively" and "lovely" suggests that simply to breathe gives a natural beauty and that this action, which is both voluntary and involuntary, is a good example of acceptance of the natural order. The notion of outdoors had been evoked by "Great Nature" (Line 13) which has a relationship not only with mankind, but with each individual, "To you and me" (Line 14), and this idea is reinforced by "lively air" which would contrast with the still, stuffy air of a study. Linking the breath of life to learning "by going where to go" (Line 15) suggests its own reward, the beauty and satisfaction of being in one's proper place. Finally, regular rhyme resumes in the second line of this tercet, and its refrain is the last one to be modified.

The quatrain sums up the significance of the poem, and the poet's reaction to it. The return to rhyme and to the strict refrains in the quatrain may represent the poet's attainment of a degree of serenity after the increasing breakdown of form and unity observed in the middle tercets. But the poet is aware of the usefulness of speculation, of testing one's ideas, since "This shaking keeps me steady" (Line 16), and indeed in the middle tercets there had been a shaking away from rhyme, from refrain and from cohesive structure¹. "I should know" may well refer to the greater part of Roethke's poems which not infrequently express the torment of a

(London: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 481.

¹In another poem, "Her Becoming" (1958), Collected Poems (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 167, Roethke portrays an old woman in harmony with the movement of life about her, and has her say "My shadow steadies in a shifting stream; / I live in air; the long light is my home", to suggest the steadiness of her presence amid the constant movement and becoming of other beings.

a mind working its way towards acceptance of itself and of the world. "Four for Sir John Davies"¹, express a degree of this vacillation between hope and despair, and as suggested by "I should know" in "The Waking", poetic expression played a significant role in keeping the poet steady. One critic sees the second line of the quatrain, "What falls away is always. And is near" (Line 17) as "an attempt to present through energetic thrusts and turns of the language that 'always' which is Now and which falls away before a man can touch it with hand or word."² But in a villanelle quatrain, a more personal and significant idea might be expected, and if the theme of this poem is awareness and learning, as expressed in the refrains, the culminating perception in line seventeen is that as a poet he has the power to summon past experience and to actualize it through the expression of his poetic intuition, so that "What falls away is always. And is near." This interpretation would suggest an added meaning in the concluding refrains: "I wake to sleep and take my waking slow/I learn by going where I have to go", since a poet need not rush his awareness, but need only follow his poetic intuition to "learn by going where [he has] to go".

Whereas most of the poets discussed who have treated the 'carpe diem' theme have been content to dwell on the fact of time's passing, Roethke in "The Waking" has explored the nature of such change and its implications for the poet. In contrast with the speculative nature of

¹See Appendix, p. 205 et seq.

²Richard A. Blessing, Theodore Roethke's Dynamic Vision (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 23.

"Four for Sir John Davies", in "The Waking" Roethke sees praxis, after a series of unanswered questions, as the humble key to a more fulfilling and time-defying gnosis,¹ our everyday perceptions being more than penetrating beyond anything, since they lead, at least for the poet, to what our categorizing minds have defined as another world. After the speculation of "Four for Sir John Davies"², "The Waking" is not just an epilogue, but a palinode to the previous four poems.

Once again, as in the case of Thomas and Empson, a by-product of the poet's use of the villanelle form has been the appreciation on the part of the critics of the form's capacity. One critic notes that the villanelle is "perfectly suited to a poem dealing with man's involvement with the natural cycle", and devotes some attention to Roethke's use of the form in "The Waking":

The poem's slow, steady rhythms support its meaning; the end-stopped lines, miraculously avoiding monotony, convey the sense of step-by-step movement. "The Waking" is one of Roethke's most successful unions of form and content.³

An implied association may be detected in this comment between monotony and the strict refrain. However, Roethke's modification of the refrain

¹Karl Malkoff in Theodore Roethke: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 105, suggests that in "The Waking", Roethke hints that there is no "knowing, no penetration of the world of appearances, apart from the 'going', our limited everyday perceptions of reality" and that therefore the poem is an expression of faith in "sheer being". However, Malkoff thus seems to be establishing an antithesis which Roethke appears to reject in his comment on "We think by feeling. What is there to know?", at least for "the metaphysical poet".

²See Appendix, p. 205 et seq.

³Malkoff, p. 122.

is not merely an effort to avoid monotony, but an organic element of the poem -- and this constitutes his particular contribution to the development of the villanelle form; furthermore, the steadiness of the rhythm involves more than a step-by-step development: it is the "shaking" (Line 16) which keeps the poet steady, rhythm being a form of shaking.

In a number of ways, Roethke's last villanelle, "The Right Thing" (1963), recalls "The Waking" and represents a further development of both the theme and the form of "The Waking". In "The Right Thing", rational speculation and philosophizing are even more strongly renounced, and an intuitive faith in the rightness of the cosmic order more strongly affirmed as the basis for thought, action and happiness¹. "The Waking" conclude "Four for Sir John Davies" and the collection The Waking; "The Right Thing" is the next to last poem in his "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical", which terminates his poetic opus, and its palinodic nature is even more evident:

The Right Thing

Let others probe the mystery if they can.
Time-harried prisoners of Shall and Will -
The right thing happens to the happy man.

The bird flies out, the bird flies back again;
The hill becomes the valley, and is still;
Let others delve that mystery if they can.

God bless the roots! - Body and soul are one!
The small becomes the great, the great the small;
The right thing happens to the happy man.

¹Blessing (p. 198) refers to Roethke's having described "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical", the sequence in which "The Right Thing" is the second to last poem, as "a hunt, a drive towards God; an effort to break through the barrier of rational experience".

Child of the dark, he can out leap the sun,
 His being single, and that being all:
 The right thing happens to the happy man.

Or he sits still, a solid figure when
 The self-destructive shake the common wall;
 Takes to himself what mystery he can,

And, praising change as the slow night comes on,
 Wills what he would, surrendering his will
 Till mystery is no more: No more he can.
 The right thing happens to the happy man.¹

In "The Waking", the insistence on the criterion of personal experience was such as to suggest a lack of serenity; "The Right Thing" carries the argument further, towards a cry of faith in the rightness of the total design after the anguished speculations on the nature of being, truth and knowledge in the preceding poems of "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical"².

The opening tercet clearly states the theme of the poem, a renunciation of rational speculation in favor of a confession of faith. "Let other probe the mystery if they can" (Line 1) renounces speculation, the nature of "others" and the subject of speculation being described in "Time-harried prisoners of Shall and Will" (Line 2), the concluding dash of this line leading to the truth the speaker has accepted in lieu of such speculation: "The right thing happens to the happy man" (Line 3). The second line is also a good description of the poet as he appeared in the earlier poems of the sequence and in his many earlier poems dealing with problems of being and non-being, time, determinism -- in this poem

¹Theodore Roethke, The Far Field (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 94.

²Ibid, pp. 77-95.

suggested by the italicised "Shall", and voluntarism suggested by "Will". This opening tercet is in the tradition of the strongest villanelles: a theme expressed by two complementary refrain lines linked by the second line of the tercet. It is true that the single line in Roethke "must bear an enormous burden of meaning"¹, a characteristic which may suggest the author's desire to be aphoristic and the danger for him of perhaps sounding platitudinous. But this poem occurs almost at the end of a sequence expressing Roethke's search for a faith: the principal refrain "The right thing happens to the happy man" expresses that faith, and in the poetic context has overtones of meaning which might be more difficult to detect had the poem been published alone or had it not dealt with issues of paramount concern to Roethke at the time it was written². Much the same criticism might have been expressed of the refrain "I learn by going where I have to go" in "The Waking", had "The Waking" not also borne a clearly palinodic relationship to the preceding "Four for Sir John Davies"³. The apparent tautology of the principal refrain is resolved by the sense of "right" and "happy", "right being taken in its meaning of 'consonant with the light of nature', 'proper', and "happy" taken in its meaning 'having good hap or fortune', 'blessed', 'having content of mind' and 'characterized by fitness for the circumstances'⁴. Thus, the refrain which remains invariable throughout the poem suggests that the man in harmony with the universe is both fortunate and

¹Malkoff, p. 145.

²Blessing (p. 216) remarks that the principal refrain, read in the context of the poems that have gone before, "takes on something of the ring of an earned truth".

³See above, p. 147.

⁴See the O.E.D. for these denotations of "right" and "happy".

content, and the double meaning is emphasized by the repetition of hap in "happens to the happy man".

In the middle tercets of "The Waking", Roethke had incorporated the modification of rhyme and refrain into their development; in the middle tercets of "The Right Thing", he carries this modification even further by transposing the traditional order of the refrains: the insistent repetition in the fourth tercet of the invariable "The right thing happens to the happy man" contrasts with the increasingly imperfect rhymes and the modifications to the refrain "Let others probe the mystery if they can" in the middle tercets. Just as "mystery" and "the right thing" contrast in the opening tercet, so in the four middle tercets, mysteries now renounced by the speaker contrast with truths that support his new insight, until finally in the quatrain, mystery disappears and the speaker's truth remains.

In the second tercet, the poet presents natural images of immutability and change, a mystery which he leaves to others to "delve" (Line 6). From living nature the poet presents the example of the returning bird, "The bird flies out, the bird flies back again" (Line 4), identical but not the same bird; from nature dead, the poet presents the testimony of geology, "The hill becomes the valley, and is still" (Line 5), the hill remaining a hill in the strata. This geological image leads to the variant form of the refrain, where "delve" is substituted for "probe", thus suggesting that Nature's mysteries are deeper than those of the philosophers.

In the third tercet of "The Waking", there had been a blessing in "God bless the Ground!"¹; in "The Right Thing", a blessing also occurs in the third tercet, in its first line: "God bless the roots!", the latter half of the line suggesting what these roots are: "Body and soul are one!" Thus, it is no longer something sustaining but apart from man that is blessed, but the roots of human being, body and soul that are one. Delving into the geological roots of nature may have lead to this consideration of the roots of man. A further contrast with "The Waking" may be noted: in "The Waking", awareness, feeling and learning had been considered separately, but in "The Right Thing", "Body and soul are one" suggests a rejection of the Cartesian approach of "The Waking"¹. In the next line of this tercet, "The small becomes the great, the great the small", the poet returns to the greater cycles of existence, microcosm and macrocosm, in relationship to which, still "The right thing happens to the happy man" (Line 9).

Just as the geological image of tercet two led to the "roots" of man in tercet three, so the great and small cycles of creation suggested in the second line of tercet three lead to the idea of man in the cosmos of tercet four. Man's own genesis from humble beginnings, "Child of the dark" to the stage where by his intellect "he can out leap the sun" (Line 10), is both an example of "The small becomes the great" (Line 8) and an implied rejection of any notion of pantheism from line eight, a pantheism which would annihilate man by absorbing him into the design. This

¹See above, p. 141.

²See above, loc. cit. .

rejection is reinforced by the poet's emphasis on man's individuality in "His being single, and that being all" (Line 11). This line may also have a rich ambiguity: read as an explanation of "Child of the dark, he can out leap the sun" (Line 10) it can suggest that the child of the dark by his individuality can surpass all of creation, symbolized by the sun; but the line can also be read to mean that being an individual is man's greatest achievement. The colon ending the line suggests the consequent reflection on this happy fate of man: "The right thing happens to the happy man". Normally, the first refrain line should recur here, but the "mystery" has already been suggested in the opening words of the tercet, "Child of the dark", and man having out leaped the sun, by his individual consciousness is aware of his "happy" place in creation.

In contrast to the movement of "out leap the sun" (Line 10), the calm opening of the fifth tercet, "Or he sits still, a solid figure" suggests calm reflection, and having considered in the fourth tercet man's rising from the depths, the speaker now considers the depths to which man can descend¹. Man who is capable of positive action in "out leaping the sun" is also capable of destructive action when "The self-destructive shake the common wall" (Line 14), the destruction of self referred to here being the most arrogant assertion of will against the natural order and

¹Tercets four and five in the ideas they present about the greatness and weakness of man residing in self-conscious intellect recall Pascal's *Pensées* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1935), p. 42, where Pascal reflects on the same subject: "Pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme. L'homme n'est qu'un roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c'est un roseau pensant." [But] "La grandeur de l'homme est grande en ce qu'il se connaît misérable."

against the community of man the social animal¹. In contrast to such action, the "happy" thinking man "Takes to himself what mystery he can" (Line 15), the inference being that perhaps it is the impenetrability of life's mysteries which had motivated the "self-destructive". Happy the man who can live with such mystery and yet strive to penetrate as much of it as he can bear. The original refrain line, "Let others probe the mystery if they can" (Line 1) is here modified to "Takes to himself what mystery he can" (Line 15), a far greater change than the earlier substitution of the verb "delve" in line six, but justified by its importance: hitherto in the poem, mystery was probed and delved by others; here the speaker suggests a better course of action, to take "to himself what mystery he can", "to himself" suggesting a more personal involvement with and acceptance of the mystery. Nor is the process complete at this point, for the sentence of line fifteen continues into the quatrain.

The consequences of the acceptance expressed in line fifteen are presented in the quatrain. Mere acceptance is not the end, but leads to an outpouring of self, "praising change as the slow night comes on" (line 16). The natural order accepted willingly by the "happy" man is not static, and the "slow night" of approaching death is part of the natural order. Acceptance of death involves a surrendering of the individual will to the immanent will which expresses itself in the natural order, but this involves no conflict of wills for the "happy man" whose will is in harmony

¹In its extreme form of suicide, this destruction deprives society, the state and the family of a member and supposes the suicide's disregard of any obligation.

with the natural order so that he "Wills what he would, surrendering his will" (Line 17). At one with the design of creation, for the speaker, it no longer presents mysteries. He has done as much as an individual can, "No more he can" (Line 18), and fortunate in his acquiescence to the natural order, nothing wrong can happen to him: "The right thing happens to the happy man" (Line 19). "Because he has made his peace with mutability, he is able to form prayers praising change and the mystery which is the source of all change."¹ With the disappearance of mystery in the quatrain, slant rhymes cease and the initial rhymes recur to end the poem.

In two sequences, Four for "Sir John Davies"² and "Sequence", Sometimes Metaphysical"³, Roethke chose the villanelle form to express acceptance of the natural order, a choice which has attracted attention to the capacities of the form:

The villanelle, with its tight interlocking rhythms and strict formal pattern, would seem to be an inappropriate form in which to celebrate change. However, in Roethke's hands the villanelle becomes a highly dynamic medium, one wholly capable of conveying its dynamic message. . . The villanelle itself becomes a non-villanelle as the form breaks down; yet "The Right Thing" has the "soul" of a villanelle, remains a villanelle in every important sense. The poem is a world in process about a world in process, a hymn to change that is an ever changing hymn.⁴

In this comment there seems to be an echo of the old criticism about the complexity of the villanelle form, but the reference to the breaking down

¹Blessing, p. 217.

²See Appendix, p. 205 et seq.

³Roethke, The Far Field, pp. 77-95.

⁴Blessing, loc. cit.

of the form points to Roethke's chief contribution to the development of the form, the successful introduction of variation in refrain and rhyme as a carefully contrived structural element of the poem, closely reflecting its thought content, enhancing its imagery and significantly contributing to its organic unity. If Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night"¹ may be considered the exemplar of the strictly traditional form of the villanelle, then Roethke's villanelles, especially "The Right Thing", rank with Auden's "Alone"² as exemplars for contemporary poets who would pursue the development of the villanelle beyond its traditional form and explore the poetic resources inherent in the form.

A brief examination of four villanelles concludes the sampling presented in this study: "Death of a Oaxaquenian" by Malcolm Lowry, "Design" by Babette Deutsch, and "Villanelle I" and "Villanelle II" by John Glassco. All four poems conform to the traditional rules of the villanelle form.

Malcolm Lowry's "Death of a Oaxaquenian" is similar to villanelles by Joyce, Auden and Roethke in that it is associated with another work of literature by the author, in Lowry's case, his novel Under the Volcano,³ although the association is not a formal one as was the case for the others.

¹See above, p. 131.

²See above, p. 101.

³Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947).

Death of a Oaxaquenian

So huge is God's despair
In the wild cactus plain
I hear Him weeping there

That I might venture where
The peon had been slain
So huge is God's despair

On the polluted air
Twixt noonday and the rain
I heard Him weeping there

And felt his anguish tear
For refuge in my brain
So huge is God's despair

That it could find a lair
In one so small and vain
I heard Him weeping there

Oh vaster than our share
Than deserts in new Spain
So huge is God's despair
I heard him weeping there . . . ¹

The poem is strongly evocative of Oaxaca as described in chapter eight of Under the Volcano, the central event of which is the death of a peon by the roadside, witnessed by passengers in a passing bus, including the 'Consul', Geoffrey Firmin, through whose alcohol-dazed consciousness most of the novel is communicated. The absence of punctuation lends a rambling quality to the sequence of ideas in the poem and the recurrent idea of the two refrain lines, God's huge despair expressed in weeping, recalls the style of Firmin's stream of consciousness as he sits in sundry cantinas, seeking escape in mescal. The stream of thought in the villanelle exhibits the same tone of alcoholic depression punctuated by flashes of

¹Malcolm Lowry, Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Earle Birney (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1962), p. 30.

acute observation or insight which characterizes the novel. What at first reading seems a stream of disparate impressions, on closer reading reveals a unity of tone and feeling expressing a combination of compassion and despair.

In the dying peon incident of chapter eight of the novel, the other characters show emotion about the dying peon, whereas Firmin shows a degree of callousness, being chary of getting involved in a sordid affair which might lead to great difficulty for one in his position. If the speaker in "Death of a Oaxaquenian" is Firmin, then the poem may be seen to express the feelings which circumstances forced Firmin to suppress on the occasion of the peon's death in the novel.

The first tercet of the poem introduces the main idea of the poem, God's weeping despair which, in the second tercet is seen to have led the speaker into "the wild cactus plain" (Line 2), so that he "might venture where/The peon had been slain" (Lines 4, 5). The third tercet describes the muggy, tropical afternoon of the event, recalling the scene in the novel with the litter beside the road and the smell of blood, the subsequent rain being likened to God's weeping, "Twixt noonday and the rain/I heard him weeping there" (Lines 8, 9).

In the fourth tercet, the speaker expresses his awareness of his resistance to compassion, a compassion which Firmin had not expressed in the novel, though he may "have felt his anguish tear/For refuge in my brain" (Lines 10, 11), and God's thus seeking refuge for his anguish in the speaker's brain further explains why he has been brought out into the plain. In the fifth tercet, the speaker expresses surprise that God should

"find a lair" "In one so small and vain" (Lines 13, 14), in which to weep. This self-depreciation is consistent with Firmin's attitude in the novel.

The concluding quatrain contrasts the speaker's unworthiness with the vastness of God's despair in "Oh vaster than our share/Than deserts in new Spain¹/So huge is God's despair" (Lines 16, 18), and brings together in the concluding refrains the theme of the poem and the speaker's involvement.

The poem may be seen as the expression of Firmin's projection onto God of his own huge despair, intensified by his feelings of guilt at having remained silent as the peon lay dying. These feelings of guilt are echoed in the refrains of the villanelle: "So huge is God's despair/I heard him weeping there". At the beginning of the poem, the weeping is heard "In the wild cactus plain" (Line 2), but by tercet five, it is in the speaker's mind that the weeping is heard, and this increasingly conscious involvement underlies the development of the middle tercets, an involvement rendered tolerable to the speaker by being expressed in terms of God's despair and compassion. Paradoxically, the whole poem becomes an expression of the speaker's compassion for God crying in the desert, and finding refuge in His despair in another kind of desert, the "lair" of the speaker's "small and vain" mind.

"Death of a Oaxaquenian" is noteworthy for the study of the villanelle as an example of the form's capacity to serve as a vehicle for

¹New Spain was the name borne by Mexico under Spanish administration.

the expression of emotion without a supporting framework of developed ideas, chiefly by means of strongly emotional refrains. The impression of a single, developing utterance of emotion is enhanced by the absence of punctuation dividing the poem into discrete statements.

Contrasting with the almost entirely emotional quality of Lowry's villanelle is the more ratiocinative style of Babette Deutsch's villanelle, "Design", cited by her as an example of a villanelle in her Poetry Handbook¹:

Design

These part us, if at heart we are embraced,
Their savage silence admits no reply:
Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste.

As hungry fasts are haunted by the taste
Of festivals gone by, the days go by.
These part us, if at heart we are embraced.

We have admired together vases chased
With peak and cataract; now stretched eyes deny
Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste.

Familiar streets, intimate rooms, erased
By them, revive, but soon our minds let die.
These part us. (If at heart we are embraced?)

Fresh pleasures glow, old troubles are outfaced
By stranger troubles, all nothing, against those high
Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste.

The punishment for lovers who have disgraced
Love, so divided, we begin to try.
These part us, if at heart we are embraced:
Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste.²

¹Deutsch, p. 168.

²Babette Deutsch, The Collected Poems of Babette Deutsch (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), p. 115.

The poem discusses the possible effect of distance and time on a close relationship, the effect being conditional to the nature of the relationship. The title refers both to purpose and intention, and to the adaptation of means to ends, to the notion of a preconceived plan. Depending on what is intended by a relationship and on the degree to which the participants are committed to it, it may or may not stand the test of time and distance. The title is thus closely linked with the first refrain line which states the conditional clause central to the discussion presented by the poem: "These part us, if at heart we are embraced" (Line 1). The key word in this refrain line is "embraced" which can take on the meaning of 'to accept, to submit' or even 'to be influenced corruptly' in addition to its more ordinary denotation of 'to be clasped as a sign of affection'. Some range of interpretation is permitted by the lack of any mention of who or what does the embracing. Thus, in the first stanza, depending on what our design is, "Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste" (Line 3) may part us "if at heart we are embraced" by them. The second line, "Their savage silence admits no reply" explains how this can come to be, for at a distance it is easier to break contact, if that is our design.

Following the traditional pattern of illustrative example, the middle tercets alternately present divisive factors or conjunctive ones rendered ineffective by distance and design. In the second tercet, passing days haunted by memories, "haunted by the taste/Of festivals gone by, the days go by" (Lines 4, 5), part us if we let their passing affect our heart, "if at heart we are embraced" (Line 6). Time can thus divide us if we are disposed to let it.

In stanza three, shared aesthetic experience, "We have admired together vases chased" (Line 7) can in a sense overcome distance, "now stretched eyes deny/Mountains of miles" (Lines 8, 9) and in tercet four, so do "Familiar streets, intimate rooms, erased/By them, revive" (Lines 10, 11), but "soon our minds let die" and distance overcomes. But if this happens, was there truly an embracement of the heart, "If at heart we are embraced?" (Line 12)?

From possibly conjunctive elements of stanzas three and four, the speaker turns to the divisive elements of tercet five, after the question which raised doubt about the relationship. These new elements, "Fresh pleasures . . . stranger troubles (Lines 13, 14) are small factors of estrangement when compared to the distance, "all nothing, against those high/Mountains of miles . . ." (Lines 14, 15).

The quatrain explains now, with reference to the title, the process of estrangement described in the preceding tercets has come about: lovers whose design admitted division now undergo the punishment for having thus betrayed love, "The punishment for lovers who have disgraced love, so divided, we begin to try" (Lines 16, 17). The faulty design is once again repeated in the concluding refrains, with the italicised "waste" in "These part us if at heart we are embraced:/Mountains of miles, the waters, and the waste." suggesting both the wasting away of inconstant love and the pity of it.

For this study, "Design" is noteworthy for its use of graphic elements, punctuation and italicization, to achieve variety of meaning in the refrains and, more significantly, for its use of an ambiguous phrase

in the principal refrain line, the clarification of which in the quatrain provides the climax of the poem and relates it as a whole to its title.

The last villanelles to be examined in this study superficially recall the first English villanelles to be considered in that they have love and death for themes, but there the resemblance would seem to end, for the seriousness of John Glassco's "Villanelle I" and "Villanelle II" have indeed little of Gosse's and Dobson's dainty sentiment¹. "Villanelle I" presents the poet's reflections on the ultimate isolation of the individual, even when the experience in question is love:

Villanelle I

My love and yours must be enjoyed alone:
My sleeping sister and infernal twin,
I know your body better than my own.

Only the natural conscience of the bone
Protests the sadness of the dream wherein
My love and yours must be enjoyed alone;

But the body has reasons to the soul unknown:
The soul of another is dark, said Augustine;
I know your body better than my own.

You that know everything that can be known,
Tell me through what punishment of what sin
My love and yours must be enjoyed alone?

Why have the darkness and the distance grown,
Why do we fear to let the stranger in?
-- I know your body better than my own,

I know the lamp is out, the bird has flown.
To find that end where other loves begin
My love and yours must be enjoyed alone:
I know your body better than my own.²

¹See above, p.48 and p. 49.

²John Glassco, Selected Poems (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 72.

The opening tercet of the poem presents the paradox that is its theme: that love which unites two persons is ultimately an individual experience, "My love and yours must be enjoyed alone" (Line 1), although mutual knowledge at the physical level may be greater than self-knowledge, "I know your body better than my own" (Line 3). The line connecting the two refrain lines, "My sleeping sister and infernal twin", emphasizes the isolation mentioned in the first line by having the speaker address not just any lover, but the speaker's "sister" and "twin". Taken literally, the terms would suggest that love even with the closest blood relative cannot overcome the individual's isolation; figuratively, the terms would suggest that one's fellow mortal, not yet awake to the reality expressed in the poem, is a fellow sufferer in the hell of isolation made all the more real by the love relationship. The third line would seem to make clear that the love referred to does not exclude physical love, especially if "know" is taken in the Biblical sense.¹

If this reference to the body in line three is disregarded, the interpretation of the second tercet presents considerable difficulty of interpretation. The "natural conscience of the bone" (Line 4) may be seen to refer to the reluctance of the body to abandon as quickly as the mind may do "the sadness"² of the dream wherein/My love and yours must be enjoyed alone", the illusion of union in love which is only that of the body and in which each partner nevertheless pursues his or her own thoughts.

¹Cf. The Holy Bible, Luke, I.34.

²The "sadness" here may be a reference to the saying "Omne animal post coitum triste", i.e. after intercourse all animals are sad.

Thus interpreted, the second tercet follows logically upon the first, and leads to the discussion of body and soul in the third tercet.

In the third tercet, the body's protest referred to in line five leads the speaker to suppose that "the body has reasons to the soul unknown", and that the union of bodies casts little light on reasons for the isolation of the soul. The authority of Augustine is adduced, "The soul of another is dark, said Augustine" (Line 8) for supposing the soul of another as unknowable. The concluding refrain of the tercet presents the contrasting knowledge of the body, "I know your body better than my own" (Line 9).

The mention of Augustine may have introduced the notion of sin, and of the woman addressed to whom great knowledge is ascribed¹, the speaker enquires, in the fourth tercet, about what sin has caused this separating isolation, "Tell me through what punishment of what sin/My love and yours must be enjoyed alone?" (Lines 11, 12). The notion of separation and isolation is expanded in the fifth tercet from "darkness and distance grown" (Line 13) to include hostility and even fear in "fear to let the stranger in" (Line 14), the "stranger" here being the mind other than our own. The refrain "I know your body better than my own" is here introduced by a dash to relate it to the previous line and to emphasize

¹Possibly an allusion to the "Adoniazusae", Idyll XV of Theocritus: "But women know everything. Yes, even how Zeus wedded Hera", The Idylls of Theocritus, trans. J.H. Hallard (London: Rivingtons, 1913), p. 80. This line of the idyll is a reference to the Iliad, XIV, 295 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), Vol. II, p. 89, where Zeus and Hera make love as they had done when first they met and their parents were unaware of it -- which led Theocritus to suggest that women know what even the gods ignore, when it comes to love.

the paradox of letting our bodies be invaded, though we fear to let anyone enter our minds.

The quatrain marks the end of such enquiry, since no answers are forthcoming, suggested by "I know the lamp is out" and the time for such questions has passed, "the bird has flown" (Line 16). The speaker suggests in "To find that end where other loves begin/My love and yours must be enjoyed alone" (Lines 17, 18)¹ that the very isolation of the soul in this love may as such be the key to other loves that begin where this love ends. Consequently, as suggested by the colon ending line 18, the speaker must at this stage be content with the knowledge which bodily love affords, as suggested by the concluding refrain, "I know your body better than my own".

The balancing contrast of knowing and not knowing, of union and separation presented in the opening tercet has in the middle tercets been explored in its causes and effects, and the enquiry concluded in the quatrain by an acceptance of partial knowledge which may lead eventually to other insight. As a villanelle, the poem continues the tradition of using the form for serious purpose, with well balanced and complementary refrains evoking throughout the poem the twin aspects which form the paradox of human love.

Glassco's "Villanelle II" presents fewer difficulties of interpretation, being a rather bitter commentary on verse four of Psalm 23, presented as the epigraph to the poem:

¹This line recalls the discussion of the types and degrees of love and of platonic love in book four of Baldesar Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 336 et seq.

Villanelle II

Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I will fear no
evil: for thou art with me.

Alas, alas, that comfortable lie,
Religion's big one! Dear, it seems to me
God will desert us when we come to die.

Souls are His business. Will He hear the cry
Wrenched from a brainless body? No, not He.
Alas, alas, that comfortable lie

Will avail us nothing when our bodies lie
Inconscient, filthy, fighting to be free:
God will desert us when we come to die,

Give us the big cold shoulder, and deny
Everything. -- In thy last hour, call on Me!
Alas, alas, that comfortable lie

Bubbled the Saviour too. He wondered why.
The poor enthusiast lacked the wit to see
God will desert us when we come to die,

Simply because He must. Dear, you and I,
Locked in each other's arms, come let us flee --
Alas, alas! -- that comfortable lie.
God will desert us when we come to die.¹

The refrains in this villanelle illustrate their use as a means of expressing strong emotion, here bitterness and despair, which outweighs the accompanying reasons for such emotion. A similar use was to be observed in Lowry's "Death of a Oaxaquenian", but with less supporting argument. The first refrain line, "Alas, alas, that comfortable lie" refers to the last words of the epigraph, "for thou art with me", the hypocrisy of which is suggested by "comfortable". The corollary to the "lie" is expressed in the second refrain line, "God will desert us when we

¹Glassco, Selected Poems, p. 76.

come to die" (Line 3), with the middle line of the tercet linking the two refrain lines, its first half "Religion's big one" referring to the "lie" in the first line, the second half of line two, "Dear, it seems to me" leading to the second refrain.

The second and third tercets are linked in a denunciation of what the speaker sees as a cruelly deceptive belief in God's attitude to our dying. "Souls are His business" (Line 4) echo "Religion's big one (lie)" in the first tercet. The answer to "Will he hear the cry . . . from a brainless body? (Line 4). is the bitter "No, not He." (Line 5). "Alas, alas," in line one had more of scepticism in it than the "Alas, alas," of line six which bitterly introduces the statement that "the comfortable lie/ Will avail us nothing" at death. The colon ending line eight indicates what we may expect: "God will desert us . . . give us the big cold shoulder, and deny/Everything" (Lines 9, 11). The example of Jesus is then adduced as part of the speaker's argument, "In thy last hour, call on Me!" (Line 11) referring to "Eli, Eli, lamma sabachtani"¹ to which there was no reply. The speaker sees the cry as a question, "He wondered why" (Line 13)², and shows pitying contempt in "The poor enthusiast lacked the wit to see/God will desert us when we come to die" (Lines 14, 15).

The sentence of tercet five concludes in the first line of the quatrain by giving as the reason for God's indifference no other reason

¹The Holy Bible, Matthew 27.45.

²There is no reference to the origin of the cry in Psalm 21.2., although the first four lines of the Psalm are despairing in tone, and for Jesus it was not just a cry but a quotation of the Psalm.

than "Simply because He must" (Line 16). The speaker's apparent response to the "comfortable lie" and God's desertion is to turn to the love of the person addressed: "Dear, you and I,/Locked in each other's arms, come let us flee --" (Lines 16, 17)¹, but the dash introducing "Alas, alas! -- that comfortable lie" (Line 18) may refer to the illusory comfort of human love as well as to the illusion of God's concern. However, the final turning of the speaker's thoughts towards God's desertion may indicate as much as the often repeated "Alas, alas" the unexpressed wish that the "comfortable lie" were not so.

In addition to its use of refrains to express strong emotion, this villanelle is notable for the way in which its structure reflects the bitter turmoil in the speaker's mind. In Roethke's villanelles, the breakdown of rhyme and refrain had reflected the development of the theme². In "Villanelle II", a different type of disharmony is used: after the statement of the first tercet, which in its two parts breaks the tercet in two, the division into grammatical units is consistently at odds with the stanzaic division, the regularity of the villanelle form presenting a contrast with the conflicting emotions it has been used to contain, and this counterpoint adds yet another element to the technique of the villanelle form.

In this chapter, the evolution and development of the villanelle, in form and content, has been traced from the Edwardian period to the

¹These lines recall a similar turning to love in Arnold's "Dover Beach", The Poetical Works, p. 210.

²See above, p. 143 and p. 152.

seventh decade of the twentieth century. The increasing use of the villanelle for serious subjects taken from a wider range of experience has been noted. A more sophisticated and flexible use of the traditional form has been observed, as well as the emergence of variant forms which have expanded the scope and adaptability of the villanelle. It now remains, in the concluding chapter to this study, to examine more closely and synthesize the various trends and developments observed in the history of the villanelle with a view to arriving at a general evaluation and appreciation of the villanelle in its historical and developmental context.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this last chapter, it is proposed to summarize the history of the villanelle as presented in this study, and to conclude the thesis by a discussion of the villanelle and its component elements in the light of that history, with respect to the development and evolution both of the villanelle form and of the subject matter for which poets have found it a suitable vehicle of poetic expression.

In the first section of Chapter One, three origins and types of villanelles are considered, the irregular virelai, the villanella and the French Renaissance villanelle. The adoption of one form of the last type as the model of the fixed-form type of villanelle is explained, and the disappearance of the villanelle towards the end of the sixteenth century is accounted for. In the second section of this chapter, the revival of the villanelle in the nineteenth century is described, examples of French villanelles are examined together with the rules of the form as prescribed by French prosodists.

The most ancient of the three original forms of the villanelle, the villanella and villanesque, is a simple, rustic song-dance, a type of which has persisted until the present day, especially in music. There has existed a mediaeval antecedent to the villanelle in the form of the virelai, but it is Jean Passerat's villanelle "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" (1563) which through the prescription of prosodists codifying the observations of César Pierre Richelet, became the model of the villanelle as it is known today. Other French Renaissance villanelles showed a wide latitude in the

use of strophe and refrain, but even in these villanelles the importance of the relationship between refrains and of each refrain to its strophe was to be noted. A translation of Passerat's villanelle serves to illustrate the crucial importance of the refrains. Just as the neo-classicism of the poets of the Pléiade and the influence of the Italian Renaissance led to the neglect of the mediaeval French fixed forms, so too the attitude of French baroque prosodists and poets may have led to the neglect of the villanelle from the seventeenth century onwards.

Théodore de Banville revives interest in the villanelle in the nineteenth century by rule and precept in his Petit Traité (1871) and by his example. His theory and practice are consistent in that he considers the form as a suitable vehicle for light, charming vers de société, and his influence in reviving interest in the form must be balanced by his influence in restricting its scope and use to subjects of light verse.

Joseph Boulmier in his Villanelles (1878) not only presents a succinct account of the earlier history of the villanelle, but in his discussion of the form presents the first rationale for its rules, explaining the importance of having complementary refrains to express the theme of the poem, and in the quatrain, to serve as its summary.

French prosodists have generally been content to conform to Banville's rules for the form and content of the villanelle, although Edmond Rostand's villanelle in his play Chanteclerc (1910) and, more significantly, Leconte de Lisle's "Villanelle" (1884) sparked some slight interest in using the villanelle to express more serious experience or in connection with other literary forms.

From the history of the French villanelle, the variety of form and treatment of the pre-Passerat villanelles deserves attention as does the almost fortuitous adoption of the Passerat model as the standard form, the earlier villanelles suggesting the possibility of a less strict approach to the villanelle form. For the English villanelle, Leconte de Lisle's "Villanelle" by its form and content, will provide a useful antecedent for a more serious villanelle, and Banville's theory and practice in its association of charm and quaintness with the villanelle will prove something of an inhibition to the development of the villanelle.

In the second chapter, the introduction of the villanelle into English literature is examined, and the practice of the first generation of English poets to use it is illustrated and discussed. Edmund Gosse is primarily responsible for the arousal of interest in the villanelle in England towards the end of the nineteenth century, chiefly through his manifesto of 1877, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse". In theory and practice he is, with respect to the villanelle, a close follower of Banville. Although he warns against a superficial or merely clever use of a fixed form such as the villanelle, in his use of the form, he is content to be charming or delicately nostalgic, and his villanelles do not exhibit any exemplary integration of refrain or organic development of theme.

Much the same criticism can be made of the villanelles on 'carpe diem' or 'carpe florem' themes of Austin Dobson, though some improvement and development in the use of the refrain is evident in the greater variety of tone achieved which contributes to the development of the theme in the poem. However, with Dobson also appears the refrain as an isolated exclamation, together with the belletristic villanelle in praise of some

other poet or cultural milieu. Oscar Wilde is also content to limit his use of the villanelle to this topic. The pair of villanelles which he titles a "double villanelle" provide a useful contrast in the use of refrain, those of the first part of "Pan" (1887) being but tenuously related and contributing little to the coherent development of the poem, whereas the refrains of the second part exhibit a closer relationship enhancing the greater unity and coherence of the villanelle. Andrew Lang's two villanelles are also in the belletristic tradition. His work is a case in point of the tendency observed among prosodists and literary historians indiscriminately to associate the French fixed forms with a group of poets including Gosse, Henley, Wilde, Dobson and Dowson even though certain of these poets may have written only two or three poems in a given form.

W.E. Henley's "The Villanelle" (1888) summarizes and exemplifies the general attitude of this period towards the villanelle as "A dainty thing", "serving its purpose passing well", but not to be used for serious poetry. Henley's practice in his two other villanelles well illustrate his theory, but also show his skill within the assumed limitations of the form. Ernest Dowson's villanelles continue the Banville-Gosse tradition of the sentimental, elegant 'carpe diem' or 'carpe florem' villanelle. However, his "Villanelle of Marguerites" exhibits a complex sophistication in the use of the refrain not hitherto observed in English. Not only do the refrains succinctly express the balancing themes of the poem, but they also attain a wide range of variation in meaning and suggestion carefully woven into the fabric of the poem.

An examination of villanelles by John Davidson concludes this chapter, these villanelles being notable for their disconformity with the traditional form and for their serious subject matter. Davidson's variation of the refrain lines suggests both the advantages of such license in achieving greater variety of meaning and the drawbacks of such practice: the refrain is a unifying element, but much of its effectiveness is lost if variation in the refrain line is not compensated for by strong association of meaning and overtone in variant refrain lines. The poet may also compensate for this weakening by means of a correspondingly greater coherence in thematic development. However, Davidson tends to develop his villanelles by associating imagery in discrete stanzas tenuously linked by a central argument, though often containing striking imagery. The breadth and significance of his themes together with the forcefulness of his utterance does not adequately offset the weakness of structure resulting from his disregard of the traditional rules of the form. Indeed, this combination of high sentence with looser structure may convey an impression of magniloquence not altogether avoided even in his "Villanelle" where the rules are more carefully observed. Nevertheless, Davidson's villanelles are instructive as evidence of the form's possibilities for serious content and for re-introducing the issue of the fixity of the villanelle form.

The first section of Chapter Three presents an account of the definition of the villanelle and related comment by representative English and American prosodists, followed by the examination, in the second section, of villanelles by English, American and Canadian poets, poems selected for the evidence they afford of the maturation, development and evolution of

the villanelle in the twentieth century.

At the turn of the century, the practice and precept of late Victorian poets have almost consecrated the notion of the villanelle as a form properly restricted to light verse, as evinced by the criticism implied in Edgar Lee Masters' "Petit the Poet" (1921) or W.W. Skeat's facetious "Villanelle". Until well into the century, prosodists are satisfied to follow the precepts of Gosse or to echo the opinion of Henley in considering the villanelle a charming trifle though Saintsbury does suggest greater licence in the English use of the fixed forms with respect to structure and refrain. Helen Cohen includes Edwin Arlington Robinson's "The House on the Hill" in her anthology, Lyric Forms from France and Louis Untermeyer mentions this poem as the exception to the rule for the subject matter of the villanelle. Thenceforth, this poem is repeatedly given as the example of the villanelle used for serious utterance, and by mid-century prosodists slowly begin to recognize a new seriousness in the villanelle, especially after the appearance of Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1951), and to show awareness of the experimentation conducted by modern poets in the villanelle form.

Although written before the turn of the century, Robinson's "The House on the Hill" (1894) is included among twentieth century villanelles by virtue of the attention its seriousness has drawn on the part of prosodists, and because of the insight its two versions afford into the process whereby the unity and coherence of a villanelle may be enhanced. Robinson's own comments about the villanelle and its composition emphasize the function of the refrain in expressing and developing the theme of a villanelle.

Similarly, the function of the refrain, especially with respect to the development of imagery, is illustrated and elucidated by James Joyce's "The Villanelle of the Temptress" (1901) and the description of its composition presented in Chapter Five of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1914).

The process of composition considered in the two foregoing villanelles leads to an examination of experimentation with form as observed in three villanelles by W.H. Auden, the first instance encountered of broad variety in the use of the villanelle by a single author. His first villanelle, "Alone" (1941) is written without refrain in the strict sense of the term, but his observance of the other rules of the form and his evident expression of the spirit of refrain in the phrasing of the refrain lines constitute a strong argument for accepting the poem as a villanelle, albeit of unorthodox form. Auden's second villanelle, "If I Could Tell You" (1942) is strictly regular and illustrates how the possible defect of repetition can be turned to advantage for a suitable theme. Auden's third villanelle, "Miranda" (1942) illustrates the more lyrical resources of the villanelle, with the refrains achieving a broad range of meaning by their allusive quality and that of the stanzas which they conclude. Of particular interest in this villanelle is the progression of Miranda's reminiscences counterpointing the recurrent central idea of the poem, her tranquil satisfaction with Ferdinand's love.

The "Empsonian flatness" attributed to "If I Could Tell You" serves to link the examination of Auden's villanelles with a study of William Empson's villanelles, poems which reveal, perhaps even more than do those of Auden, the evolution of the villanelle towards more serious

content and the utilization of new imagery derived from science. Empson's villanelles "Missing Dates" (1941) and "Villanelle" (1928) illustrate this new trend and present imagery revealing levels of ambiguity which greatly broaden their meaning. In both villanelles, the refrains exhibit the capacity to express anguish and reveal a greater complexity of relationship by being complementary in meaning while presenting a contrast in rhythm. Not since Dowson's "Villanelle of Marguerites" has such skill been observed in the developmental pattern of the middle tercets. Empson in these villanelles also notably illustrates the technique of enhancing the coherence of the villanelle by means of recurrent elements other than the refrains, so that the concluding refrains gain point and intensity from the dense texture of the rest of the poem.

Empson's abstractive and scientific imagery and his concern with precision carried almost to the point of exegesis risk becoming mannerism, as Dylan Thomas' satirical "Request to Leda": "Homage to William Empson" (1942), illustrates, but the writing of the satire in villanelle tercets may have served to acquaint Thomas with the resources of the villanelle form which he was to use in his elegiac villanelle on the death of his father, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night". This villanelle may be seen as a culmination in the use of the traditional form of villanelle by virtue of its richly suggestive complementary refrains, the lyrically linked illustrative variations of its middle tercets and the carefully developed emotional and lyrical climax of the quatrain. The poem is also important to the development of the villanelle by the critical comment it has elicited heralding the demise of the hitherto traditional view of the villanelle as a slight, dainty thing proper for light verse.

What Thomas accomplishes for the villanelle in traditional form, Theodore Roethke does for the more variable form of the villanelle, continuing a trend traceable back through Auden and Davidson to Leconte de Lisle. Roethke's villanelles "The Waking" (1953) and "The Right Thing" (1963) illustrate how the villanelle form may be varied without loss of the essential quality of the form and even be greatly enriched by the greater flexibility which the form may thus assume. What Auden had demonstrated by his elimination of the refrain in "Alone", Roethke supplements in his combination of modification to both refrain and rhyme organically linked to the development of the whole poem. Moreover, Roethke also combines the two chief patterns of development of the middle tercets, illustrative variation and argument. Still another innovation is the relationship the villanelles bear to each other, suggesting the possibility of linked villanelles first adumbrated in Wilde's "Pan". The palinodic quality of these two villanelles with respect to preceding poetry by Roethke and to his own philosophical development complete the effect of Thomas' villanelle in establishing the villanelle as a suitable form for serious verse.

The last four villanelles examined in Chapter Three are in the traditional form, Malcolm Lowry's "Death of a Oaxaquenian" (1962) serving to illustrate how the villanelle can serve to express intense personal emotion by means of suggestive refrains. Thomas had also used the villanelle to express intense emotion but had greater recourse to allusion and argument; in Lowry's villanelle, it is the personal experience of an event which provides most of the matter of the poem. Babette Deutsch's "Design" (1969) affords a useful example of the use of graphic devices

and ambiguous pivot word "embraced", to achieve meaningful variation in the refrain. Finally, John Glassco's "Villanelle I" and "Villanelle II" (1971) present further development in the use of imagery and allusion in the style of Auden and Empson, to conclude the chapter.

To complete the history of the villanelle presented in this study, it is proposed to bring together and discuss considerations of a more theoretical nature regarding the villanelle and its component elements.

The nineteen lines of the villanelle, organized into five tercets and a quatrain, make it longer than a sonnet, though minus its refrains it would be thirteen lines in length. Strengthened by the refrains, it shares the sonnet's capacity for intensity of expression. Precedents exist for variation in form, apart from the pre-Passerat villanelles, such as Passerat's lesser known villanelle "Qui en sa fantasie" in five quatrains rhyming AA BB, Leconte de Lisle's curtal "Villanelle", Gosse's seven tercets in "Wouldst Thou Not Be Content to Die", and the six tercets of Davidson's "Villanelle". However, the longer forms are not noteworthy successful; more stanzas involve more refrains, with the consequent risk of appearing monotonous or cleverly repetitious. The six refrains of the Passerat model has been shown by experience to represent a satisfactory modicum.

Although two refrains and their rhymes are characteristic of the Passerat model which became the traditional form, such poets as Eustache Deschamps, Joachim du Bellay and Etienne Jodelle provide examples of successful lyrical villanelles with single refrain at the end of each stanza, and this practice deserves notice on the part of modern poets who would use the villanelle for more lyrical purposes.

The effectiveness of the villanelle is strongly dependent on the nature of its refrains, the most effective of which have been seen to be not only richly suggestive in themselves, but complementary to each other in a variety of ways. This complementary quality may be attained by such means as grammatical coherence, contrast, antithesis, simile, balance, question and answer, cause and effect. One refrain may remain invariable in meaning and be counterpointed by the other refrain assuming a variety of meanings or, as in Roethke's "The Right Thing", various forms. The invariable refrain is often suggestive of incantation, the poet's repetition of an arresting thought, plea, attachment or experience. On the other hand, a refrain which varies in meaning is often expressive of irony, increasing awareness or the development of an argument or intellectual process. In such variable refrains, a pivot word or phrase is often encountered, the ambiguity of which permits the variation in meaning as in Deutsch's "Design". The most limited form of the refrain would seem to be the self-contained epithet or exclamation, as in Dobson's "For a Copy of Theocritus", which cannot easily be related to stanzas in which it appears.

The practice of Davidson, Auden and Roethke, especially, has illustrated the possibilities and dangers of modifying or discarding the formal refrain. Their practice suggests that it is preferable to work such modification into the design of the poem rather than to modify the refrain to suit individual stanzas. A law of compensation may be discerned from the practice of these three poets: where one or more of the rules of the villanelle are relaxed, its other elements must be designed to bear a greater part in enhancing the unity and coherence of the poem. Where such

relaxation forms part of a general design closely linked to the theme of the poem, as in Roethke's "The Right Thing", the total effect can be one of extraordinary coherence; but the opposite may be observed where such relaxation does not involve a corresponding increase in coherence, as in Davidson's "Villanelle".

No departure from the use of two rhymes for a villanelle has been noted, linked as they are with the two refrains characteristic of the form. The chief development observed with respect to rhyme has been Roethke's introduction of progressively imperfect rhymes as part of the design of the poem. Such deliberate use of variation in rhyme is to be preferred to the somewhat labored development productive of correct rhymes to be seen, for instance, in Wilde's first "Pan" villanelle.

The opening and closing stanzas have the greatest bearing on the effectiveness of the villanelle. As Boulmier had observed, the first and third line of the opening stanza establish the formal and thematic basis of the poem and are organically connected by the second line. This middle line often presents the key to the pattern of the middle tercets, and after the condition or issue introduced by the second line has been dealt with in the middle tercets, the refrains come together naturally in the quatrain, often after its first two lines have expressed the most intimate or personal implication of the preceding tercets. In such a structure in the villanelle, there is a process which can be likened to the play of octave and sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet or, to a lesser degree, to the developing quatrains of a Shakespearean sonnet. The opening stanza of the villanelle states the problem or issue, the middle tercets provide ground for elaboration, discussion or illustration, and the quatrain re-introduces

the now enriched and elucidated themes.

The pattern of the middle tercets often conforms to one of two types, example and illustration or developed argument. This categorization represents a polarity, since one may observe a development in the illustrations or find examples illustrating a developing argument. Roethke's "The Waking" and "The Right Thing" are noteworthy for combining elements of the two patterns. For both patterns, the refrain serves the useful function of relating illustration to the central themes or reflecting the change in attitude or thought being brought about by the argument.

Considerable work remains to be done in the study of the villanelle and of certain aspects of the French fixed forms particularly relevant to the villanelle. The nature and function of the refrain in poetry constitutes a promising field of research in this respect. From a more historical point of view, the significant effect of personal relationship between poets in propagating the use of a poetic form deserves exploration. In the course of this study, it became apparent that personal contact among poets was not without significance in propagating the use of the villanelle. Finally, it is suggested that an annotated anthology of the villanelle in English could significantly affect the development and use of the villanelle by contemporary poets in making known to them and to the reading public a form which has received relatively little recognition in the past and whose possibilities, as suggested in this thesis, are only in this century becoming fully explored.

APPENDIX

This appendix contains poems
referred to but not presented
in the text of the thesis.

JOACHIM DU BELLAY

D'un vanneur de blé aux vents

(Villanelle, without refrain)

A vous, troppé legere,
 Qui d'æle passagere
 Par le monde volez,
 Et d'un sifflant murmure
 L'ombrageuse verdure
 Doucement esbranlez,

J'offre ces violettes,
 Ces lis et ces fleurettes,
 Et ces roses icy,
 Ces vermeillettes roses,
 Tout freschement écloses,
 Et ces œilletz aussi.

De vostre douce haleine
 Eventez ceste plaine,
 Eventez ce sejour,
 Cependant que j'ahanne
 A mon blé, que je vanne
 A la chaleur du jour.¹

Villanelle

En ce moy délicieux,
 Qu'amour toute chose incite,
 Un chacun à qui mieulx mieulx
 La doulceur du temps imite,
 Mais une rigueur despite
 Me faict pleurer mon malheur.
 Belle et franche Marguerite,
 Pour vous j'ay ceste douleur.

Dedans vostre œil gracieux
 Toute doulceur est escrite,
 Mais la doulceur de voz yeux
 En amertume est confite,
 Souvent la couleuvre habite
 Dessoubs une belle fleur.
 Belle et franche Marguerite,
 Pour vous j'ay ceste douleur.

Or puis que je deviens vieux,
 Et que rien ne me profite,
 Desesperé d'avoir mieulx,
 Je m'en iray rendre hermite,
 Je m'en iray rendre hermite,
 Pour mieulx pleurer mon malheur
 Belle et franche Marguerite,
 Pour vous j'ay ceste douleur.

Mais si la faveur des Dieux
 Au bois vous avoit conduite,
 Où, desesperé d'avoir mieulx,
 Je m'en iray rendre hermite:
 Peult estre que ma poursuite
 Vous feroit changer couleur.
 Belle et franche Marguerite,²
 Pour vous j'ay ceste douleur.

¹Patterson, III, p. 381.

²Patterson, loc. cit.

PHILIPPE DESPORTES

Villanelle

Rozette, pour un peu d'absence
 Vostre cœur vous avez changé,
 Et moy, sçachant cette inconstance,
 Le mien autre part j'ay rangé:
 Jamais plus, beauté si legere
 Sur moy tant de pouvoir n'aura:
 Nous verrons, volage bergere,
 Qui premier s'en repentira.

Tandis qu'en pleurs je me consume,
 Maudissant cet esloignement,
 Vous, qui n'aimez que par coustume,
 Caressiez un nouvel amant.
 Jamais legere girouette
 Au vent si tost ne se vira:
 Nous verrons, bergere Rozette,
 Qui premier s'en repentira.

Où sont tant de promesses saintes,
 Tant de pleurs versez en partant?
 Est-il vrai que ces tristes plaintes
 Sortissent d'un cœur inconstant?
 Dieux! que vous estes mensongere!
 Maudit soit qui plus vous croira!
 Nous verrons, volage bergere,
 Qui premier s'en repentira.

Celuy qui a gagné ma place
 Ne vous peut aymer tant que moy,
 Et celle que j'aime vous passe
 De beauté, d'amour et de foy.
 Gardez bien vostre amitié neuve,
 La mienne plus ne varira,
 Et puis, nous verrons à l'espreuve
 Qui premier s'en repentira.¹

¹Patterson, III, p. 382.

THEOPHILE GAUTIER

Villanelle Rythmique

Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids,
Tous les deux nous irons, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet au bois;
Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,
Nous irons écouter les merles
Siffler.

Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants béni,
Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,
Dit des vers au rebord du nid.
Oh! viens donc sur le banc de mousse,
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:
Toujours!

Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,
Faisons fuir le lapin caché,
Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand bois penché;
Puis, chez nous, tout joyeux, tout aises,
En panier enlaçant nos doigts,
Revenons rapportant des fraises
Des bois.¹

¹Gautier, p. 208.

THEODORE DE BANVILLE

Villanelle

de Buloz

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pleurons, et vous de cognac
Mettez une pièce en perce!
J'ai perdu mon Limayrac,
Je veux me vêtir d'un sac!¹

Octobre 1845.

¹Banville, Poésies Complètes, I, p. 235.

JOSEPH BOULMIER

Rondeau Manqué

Vraiment le diable s'en mêle;
Il me fallait un rondeau,
Je trouve une villanelle.

En prenant la rime en "elle"
j'ai brouillé mon écheveau:
Vraiment le diable s'en mêle.

C'est forcé: la "pastourelle"
Amène son "pastoureau";
Je trouve une villanelle.

Puis la douce "tourterelle"
Vient avec son "tourtereau";
Vraiment le diable s'en mêle.

J'y mets pourtant tout mon zèle,
Mais au bout de mon rouleau
Je trouve une villanelle.

J'ai beau creuser ma cervelle
Pour obtenir du nouveau,
Vraiment le diable s'en mêle,
Je trouve une villanelle.¹

¹Boulmier, p. 97.

JOSEPH BOULMIER

La Joconde

Ange ou démon, je t'admire,
Toi, l'"éternel Féminin",
Joconde, effrayant sourire!

Ce pli-là, que veut-il dire?
Qu'importe? il est doux et fin:
Ange ou démon, je t'admire.

Jamais savant n'a pu lire
Dans ton grimoire divin,
Joconde, effrayant sourire!

Ton regard fascine, attire,
Puissant comme le destin:
Ange ou démon, je t'admire.

Revis, spectre, et que j'expire
Sous ton baiser assassin,
Joconde, effrayant sourire!

T'adorer ou te maudire,
Tout est là; le reste est vain.
Ange ou démon, je t'admire,¹
Joconde, effrayant sourire!

¹Boulmier, -p. 105.

MAURICE ROLLINAT

Mon Epinette

Jean fait la cour à Jeannette
Dans mon salon campagnard,
Aux sons de mon épinette.

Fou de sa mine finette
Et de son grand oeil mignard,
Jean fait la cour à Jeannette

Dont la voix de serinette
Mêle un branle montagnard
Aux sons de mon épinette.

Avec une chansonnette
Au refrain très égrillard
Jean fait la cour à Jeannette.

-Là-bas, plus d'une rainette
Coasse dans le brouillard,
Aux sons de mon épinette.

La lune à la maisonnette,
Sourit, -timide et gaillard,
Jean fait la cour à Jeannette.

Il suit partout la brunette,
De l'étagère au placard,
Aux sons de mon épinette.

Aussi câlin que Minette
Qui se purlèche à l'écart,
Jean fait la cour à Jeannette.

Il effleure sa cornette
D'un baiser; -puis, sur le tard,
Aux sons de mon épinette,

Pendant que la grande Annette
Endort son petit moutard,
Jean fait la cour à Jeannette
Aux sons de mon épinette.¹

AUSTIN DOBSON

'When This Old World Was New'

When this old world was new,
Before the towns were made,
Love was a shepherd too.

Clear-eyed as flowers men grew,
Of evil unafraid,
When this old world was new.

No skill has they to woo,
Who but their hearts obey'd-
Love was a shepherd too.

What need to feign or sue?
Not thus was life delay'd
When this old world was new.

Under the cloudless blue
They kiss'd their shepherd-maid-
Love was a shepherd too.

They knew but joy; they knew
No pang of Love decay'd:
When this old world was new,
Love was a shepherd too.¹

¹Dobson, p. 364.

AUSTIN DOBSON

On A Nankin Plate

'Ah me, but it might have been!
Was there ever so dismal a fate? -
Quoth the little blue mandarin.

'Such a maid as was never seen!
She passed, tho' I cried to her "Wait,"-
Ah me, but it might have been!

'I cried, "O my Flower, my Queen,
Be mine!" 'Twas precipitate,'-
Quoth the little blue mandarin,-

'But then . . . she was just sixteen,-
Long-eyed, -as a lily straight,-
Ah me, but it might have been!

'As it was, from her palankeen,
She laughed -"You're a week too late!"'
(Quoth the little blue mandarin.)

'That is why, in a mist of spleen,
I mourn on this Nankin Plate.
Ah me, but it might have been!'-
Quoth the little blue mandarin.¹

¹Austin Dobson, p. 338.

AUSTIN DOBSON

'Tu Ne Quaesieris'

Seek not, O Maid, to know
(Alas! unblest the trying!)
When thou and I must go.

No lore of stars can show.
What shall be, vainly prying,
Seek not, O Maid, to know.

Will Jove long years bestow?—
Or is't with this one dying,
That thou and I must go,

Now, —when the great winds blow,
And waves the reef are plying?
Seek not, O Maid, to know.

Rather let clear wine flow,
On no vain hope relying;
When thou and I must go

Lies dark; —then be it so.
Now, —now, churl Time is flying;
Seek not, O Maid, to know
When thou and I must go.¹

¹Dobson, p. 339.

ANDREW LANG

Villanelle

(To M. Joseph Boulmier, Author of
'Les Villanelles')

Villanelle, why art thou mute?
Hath the singer ceased to sing?
Hath the Master lost his lute?

Many a pipe and scrannel flute
On the breeze their discords fling;
Villanelle, why art thou mute?

Sound of tumult and dispute,
Noise of war the echoes bring;
Hath the Master lost his lute?

Once he sang of bud and shoot
In the season of the spring;
Villanelle, why art thou mute?

Fading leaf and falling fruit
Say, 'The year is on the wing,
Hath the Master lost his lute?'

Ere the axe lie at the root,
Ere the winter come as king,
Villanelle, why art thou mute?¹
Hath the Master lost his lute?

¹Lang, III, p. 131.

ANDREW LANG

Villanelle

to Lucia

Apollo left the golden Muse
And shepherded a mortal's sheep,
Theocritus of Syracuse!

To mock the giant swain that woos
The sea-nymph in the sunny deep,
Apollo left the golden Muse.

Afield he drove his lambs and ewes
Where Milon and where Battus reap,
Theocritus of Syracuse!

To watch thy tunny-fishers cruise
Below the dim Sicilian steep
Apollo left the golden Muse.

Ye twain did loiter in the dews,
Ye slept the swain's unfever'd sleep,
Theocritus of Syracuse!

That time might half with his confuse
Thy songs -like his, that laugh and leap-
Theocritus of Syracuse,
Apollo left the golden Muse!¹

¹Lang, III, p. 103.

ERNEST DOWSON

Villanelle of Sunset

Come hither, Child! and rest:
This is the end of day,
Behold the weary West!

Sleep rounds with equal zest
Man's toil and children's play:
Come hither, Child! and rest.

My white bird, seek thy nest,
Thy drooping head down lay:
Behold the weary West!

Now are the flowers confest
Of slumber: sleep, as they!
Come hither, Child! and rest.

Now eve is manifest,
And homeward lies our way:
Behold the weary West!

Tired flower! upon my breast,
I would wear thee alway:
Come hither, Child! and rest;
Behold, the weary West! 1

¹Dowson, p. 7.

ERNEST DOWSON

Villanelle of His Lady's Treasures

I took her dainty eyes, as well
As silken tendrils of her hair:
And so I made a Villanelle!

I took her voice, a silver bell,
As clear as song, as soft as prayer;
I took her dainty eyes as well.

It may be, said I, who can tell,
These things shall be my less despair?
And so I made a Villanelle!

I took her whiteness virginal
And from her cheek two roses rare:
I took her dainty eyes as well.

I said: "It may be possible
Her image from my heart to tear!"
And so I made a Villanelle.

I stole her laugh, most musical:
I wrought it in with artful care;
I took her dainty eyes as well;
And so I made a Villanelle.¹

¹Dowson, p. 52.

ERNEST DOWSON

Villanelle of Acheron

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,¹
Beyond the scope of any sun.

¹Dowson, p. 131.

LOUIS UNTERMEYER

Lugubrious Villanelle of Platitudes

Eheu fugaces, Postume.-Horace. Book II: Ode 14

Ah, Postumus, my Postumus, the years are slipping by;
 Old age with hurrying footsteps draws nearer day by day;
 And we will leave this friendly earth and every friendlier
 tie.

Soon Death, whose strength is never spent, whose sword is
 always high,
 Will beckon us, and all our faith will win us no delay.
 Ah, Postumus, my Postumus, the years are slipping by.

Grim Pluto waits for all of us; he waits with pitiless eye,
 Until we journey down the stream that carried us away;
 And we will leave this friendly earth and every friendlier
 tie.

Though we be kings or worse than slaves, the eager moments
 fly;
 Though we be purer than the gods, Time will not halt or
 stay-
 Ah, Postumus, my Postumus, the years are slipping by.

Aye, we must go, though we have shunned the red sun of
 July,
 The bitter winds, the treacherous surf, the blind and sav-
 age fray,
 And we will leave this friendly earth and every friendlier
 tie.

Too soon the stubborn hand of Fate tears all our dreams
 awry;
 Too soon the plowman quits his plow, the child his happy
 play-
Ah, Postumus, my Postumus, the years are slipping by,
And we will leave this friendly earth and every friendlier
tie.¹

¹Cohen, p. 440.

WILLIAM EMPSON

Reflection from Anita Loos

No man is sure he does not need to climb.
It is not human to feel safely placed.
"A girl can't go on laughing all the time."

Wrecked by their games and jeering at their prime
There are who can, but who can praise their taste?
No man is sure he does not need to climb.

Love rules the world but is it rude, or slime?
All nasty things are sure to be disgraced.
A girl can't go on laughing all the time.

Christ stinks of torture who was caught in lime.
No star he aimed at is entirely waste.
No man is sure he does not need to climb.

It is too weak to speak of right and crime.
Gentlemen prefer bound feet and the wasp waist.
A girl can't go on laughing all the time.

It gives a million gambits for a mime
On which a social system can be based:
No man is sure he does not need to climb,¹
A girl can't go on laughing all the time.¹

¹Empson, p. 66.

DYLAN THOMAS

Elegy

Too proud to die, broken and blind he died
The darkest way, and did not turn away,
A cold kind man brave in his narrow pride

On that darkest day. Oh, forever may
He lie lightly, at last, on the last, crossed
Hill, under the grass, in love, and there grow

Young among the long flocks, and never lie lost
Or still all the numberless days of his death, though
Above all he longed for his mother's breast

Which was rest and dust, and in the kind ground
The darkest justice of death, blind and unblessed.
Let him find no rest but be fathered and found,

I prayed in the crouching room, by his blind bed,
In the muted house, one minute before
Noon, and night, and light. The rivers of the dead

Veined his poor hand I held, and I saw
Through his unseeing eyes to the roots of the sea.
[An old tormented man three-quarters blind,

I am not too proud to cry that He and he
Will never never go out of my mind.
All his bones crying, and poor in all but pain,

Being innocent, he dreaded that he died
Hating his God, but what he was was plain:
An old kind man brave in his burning pride.

The sticks of the house were his; his books he owned.
Even as a baby he had never cried;
Nor did he now, save to his secret wound.

Out of his eyes I saw the last light glide.
Here among the light of the lording sky
An old man is with me where I go

Walking in the meadows of his son's eye
On whom a world of ills came down like snow.
He cried as he died, fearing at last the spheres'

Last sound, the world going out without a breath:
Too proud to cry, too frail to check the tears,
And caught between two nights, blindness and death.

O deepest wound of all that he should die
On that darkest day. Oh, he could hide
The tears out of his eyes, too proud to cry.

Until I die he will not leave my side.] ¹

¹Thomas, Dylan Thomas: The Poems, p. 216.

THEODORE ROETHKE

Four For Sir John Davies

I

The Dance

Is that dance slowing in the mind of man
That made him think the universe could hum?
The great wheel turns its axle when it can;
I need a place to sing, and dancing-room,
And I have made a promise to my ears
I'll sing and whistle romping with the bears.

For they are all my friends: I saw one slide
Down a steep hillside on a cake of ice,-
Or was that in a book? I think with pride:
A caged bear rarely does the same thing twice
In the same way: O watch his body sway!-
This animal remembering to be gay.

I tried to fling my shadow at the moon,
The while my blood leaped with a wordless song.
Though dancing needs a master, I had none
To teach my toes to listen to my tongue.
But what I learned there, dancing all alone,
Was not the joyless motion of a stone.

I take this cadence from a man named Yeats;
I take it, and I give it back again:
For other tunes and other wanton beats
Have tossed my heart and fiddled through my brain.
Yes, I was dancing-mad, and how
That came to be the bears and Yeats would know.¹

¹Roethke, The Waking, p. 116.

THEODORE ROETHKE

II

The Partner

Between such animal and human heat
I find myself perplexed. What is desire?—
The impulse to make someone else complete?
That woman would set sodden straw on fire.
Was I the servant of a sovereign wish,
Or ladle rattling in an empty dish?

We played a measure with commingled feet:
The lively dead had taught us to be fond.
Who can embrace the body of his fate?
Light altered light along the living ground.
She kissed me close, and then did something else.
My marrow beat as wildly as my pulse.

I'd say it to my horse: we live beyond
Our outer skin. Who's whistling up my sleeve?
I see a heron prancing in his pond;
I know a dance the elephants believe.
The living all assemble! What's the cue?—
Do what the clumsy partner wants to do!

Things loll and loiter. Who condones the lost?
This joy outleaps the dog. Who cares? Who cares?
I gave her kisses back, and woke a ghost.
O what lewd music crept into our ears!
The body and the soul know how to play
In that dark world where gods have lost their way.¹

¹Roethke, The Waking, p. 117.

THEODORE ROETHKE

III

The Wraith

Incomprehensible gaiety and dread
Attended what we did. Behind, before,
Lay all the lonely pastures of the dead;
The spirit and the flesh cried out for more.
We two, together, on a darkening day
Took arms against our own obscurity.

Did each become the other in that play?
She laughed me out, and then she laughed me in;
In the deep middle of ourselves we lay;
When glory failed, we danced upon a pin.
The valley rocked beneath the granite hill;
Our souls looked forth, and the great day stood still.

There was a body, and it cast a spell,-
God pity those but wanton to the knees,-
The flesh can make the spirit visible;
We woke to find the moonlight on our toes.
In the rich weather of a dappled wood
We played with dark and light as children should.

What shape leaped forward at the sensual cry?-
Sea-beast or bird flung toward the ravaged shore?
Did space shake off an angel with a sigh?
We rose to meet the moon, and saw no more.
It was and was not she, a shape alone,
Impaled on light, and whirling slowly down.¹

¹Roethke, The Waking, p. 118.

THEODORE ROETHKE

IV

The Vigil

Dante attained the purgatorial hill,
Trembled at hidden virtue without flaw,
Shook with a mighty power beyond his will,-
Did Beatrice deny what Dante saw?
All lovers live by longing, and endure:
Summon a vision and declare it pure.

Though everything's astonishment at last,
Who leaps to heaven at a single bound?
The links were soft between us; still, we kissed;
We undid chaos to a curious sound:
The waves broke easy, cried to me in white;
Her look was morning in the dying light.

The visible obscures. But who knows when?
Things have their thought: they are the shards of me;
I thought that one, and thought comes round again;
Rapt, we leaned forth with what we could not see.
We danced to shining; mocked before the black
And shapeless night that made no answer back.

The world is for the living. Who are they?
We dared the dark to reach the white and warm.
She was the wind when wind was in my way;
Alive at noon, I perished in her form.
Who rise from flesh to spirit know the fall:
The word outleaps the world, and light is all.¹

¹Roethke, The Waking, p. 119.

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ABSTRACT OF

The Origin and Development of the Villanelle in English
Literature

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the history and development of the villanelle from its origins to the present time, and to examine the essential characteristics of the villanelle as a poetic form.

Three origins are to be considered for the villanelle: the mediaeval irregular virelai as used by Eustache Deschamps (c. 1346 - c. 1406), the Italian rustic song-dance called the villanella, and the French Renaissance imitation of this latter form called the villanelle. Jean Passerat's villanelle "J'ay perdu ma tourterelle" (1563) became the model for subsequent villanelles through the influence of prosodists codifying the observations of Pierre Richelet (1631-1698). The traditional form of the villanelle thus became that of a nineteen line poem in five tercets rhyming aba and a concluding quatrain rhyming abba, with the first line of the initial tercet serving as the last line of the second and fourth tercets, and the third line of the initial tercet serving as the last line of the third and fifth tercets, these two refrain lines following each other to constitute the last two lines of the quatrain.

The villanelle was neglected from the end of the sixteenth century until its revival by Theodore de Banville, chiefly by means of his Petit Traité de Versification Française (1871). The villanelle was introduced into English literature by Edmund Gosse in his "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" (1877) and, following the example of Banville and most

French poets employing the form, was used by such poets as Gosse, Austin Dobson, Oscar Wilde, W.E. Henley and Ernest Dowson chiefly for light verse or poems on 'carpe diem', 'carpe florem' or belletristic themes. John Davidson (1851-1909) was the first English poet to use the villanelle for more serious utterance, and his villanelles also serve to illustrate the pitfalls of introducing variation into villanelle refrains without integrating the variation coherently into the development of the poem.

English and American prosodists have been slow to recognize the possibilities of the villanelle as a vehicle for serious expression. Most have been content to repeat the precepts and opinion of nineteenth century English and French poets and prosodists. Edwin Arlington Robinson's "The House on the Hill" (1894) is the first serious villanelle in English to be recognized as such by prosodists. James Joyce's "The Villanelle of the Temptress" (1901) and its context in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man describe the function of the refrain in the composition of a villanelle. William Empson, Dylan Thomas and Malcolm Lowry contribute to the development of the villanelle in traditional form: W.H. Auden and Theodore Roethke explore the possibilities of the villanelle in forms which adhere less closely to the Passerat model. Most recently, Babette Deutsch and John Glassco illustrate contemporary development in the use of the traditional villanelle form.

Strengthened by its refrains and despite its greater length, the villanelle shares the sonnet's capacity for intensity of expression. The history of the form has shown the six stanzas of the Passerat model to be the most satisfactory length for the villanelle. The effectiveness of the villanelle is strongly dependent on its complementary refrains. Where

variable refrains are used, the variation should form an integral part of the development of the poem. The opening tercet of the villanelle generally states the theme of the poem, the middle tercets provide for elaboration, discussion or illustration of the theme, and the quatrain provides a climax in the re-introduction of the concluding refrain lines.

This thesis, submitted in 1975 to the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts, the University of Ottawa, Canada, in view of obtaining the degree of Master of Arts, comprises