

Mrs. Goldman
The Villanelle

The VILLANELLE is a highly specialized form and is difficult to write without seeming trite or repetitive. It is a French Verse form with 19 lines divided into 5 TERCETS and 1 QUATRAIN. Two rhymes or repeated lines predominate. This often gives the poem a circular feeling. Fill in the rhyme scheme next to the following poem:

The Waking
Theodore Roethke

fate can be unknown - feared - b/c you can accept it by feeling it - you can accept it.

WAKE
GO
FEAR
Do: Now: write about these words.

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

- this is fate

learning to accept fate by encountering it.

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.

nothing sensation of one's being.

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.

- death - (fate)

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.

- questions of life
- cycle

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

- mortality
- live life

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

- thinking about fate
- cycle of life

Read the poem aloud. How does it sound?

repetitive / circular - ideas ~~are~~ come full circle.

Which lines are repeated? Write the lines below.

1, 6, 12, 18 3, 9, 15, 19

Circle the alliteration in each line and write down the words next to the line. Are the words important to the poem? Why or why not?

worm / winding
sleep / slow
feel / fate
they are key ideas to the understanding of the poem

Read the poem again, paying more attention to the repetition. What feeling do you get?

Search for answers
constant questioning

What is a paradox? List the paradoxes in the poem.

Two diametrically opposite ideas

Ⓟ

Look at the first stanza. What do you think it could mean?

fate can be feared b/c it is unknown
but by feeling it, one can accept it.

If a Villanelle gives you a circular feeling, what could Roethke be analyzing the circle of?

Life

What is the imagery in the 4th stanza. Why is Roethke making comparisons to nature?

worm in a tree -
nature - cycles of life

What do you think he is trying to say in the final stanza?

contemplating the unknown (shaking)
calms him.

Do you think the villanelle is an effective form? Why or why not?

Yes - it gives a feeling to the reader
that helps to understand
what the author tries to
stanzas & groups

Below, write your interpretation of the poem, making references to literary forms and devices.

Convey.