In line 8 Collins refers to the stations of the cross. In Roman Catholicism, one of the devotions consists of prayers and meditations before each of fourteen crosses or images set up along a path that commemorates the fourteen places at which Jesus halted when, just before the Crucifixion, he was making his way in Jerusalem to Golgotha.

Sonnet

[2001]

All we need is fourteen lines, well, thirteen now,
and after this next one just a dozen
to launch a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas,
then only ten more left like rows of beans.
How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan
and insist the iambic bongos must be played
and rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,
one for every station of the cross.
But hang on here while we make the turn
into the final six where all will be resolved,
where longing and heartache will find an end,
where Laura will tell Petrarch to put down his pen,
take off those crazy medieval tights,
blow out the lights, and come at last to bed.

YOUR TURN

1. The headnote explains the stations of the cross (line 8), but what is the point of introducing this image into a sonnet?
2. Normally the "turn" (*volta*) in an Italian sonnet occurs at the beginning of the ninth line; the first eight lines (the octave) establish some sort of problem, and the final six lines (the sestet) respond, for instance by answering a question, or by introducing a contrasting emotion. In your view, how satisfactorily does Collins handle this form?
3. Does this sonnet interest you? Do you find it clever? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
4. Do you think that you could have written this sonnet? Could you have written Shakespeare's sonnets 73 and 146 (pages 675–76)? What do your responses to these questions suggest to you about the writing of poetry?

The Villanelle

The name comes from an Italian words, *villanella,* meaning "country song" or "peasant song," and originally, in the sixteenth century, the subject was the supposedly simple life of the shepherd, but in France in the seventeenth century elaborate rules were developed. Variations occur, but usually a **villanelle** has the following characteristics:

- Five stanzas with three lines each (tercets), rhyming *aba,* and a final stanza with four lines (a quatrain).

- The first line of the first stanza is repeated as the last line of the second stanza and the last line of the fourth stanza.
- The third line of the first stanza is repeated as the last line of the third stanza and the last line of the fifth stanza.
- The quatrain that concludes the villanelle rhymes *abaa*, using the first and third lines of the first stanza as the next-to-last and the last lines of the final stanza—i.e., the poem ends with a couplet.

Because the villanelle repeats one sound thirteen times (in the first and last line of each tercet, and in the first, third, and fourth lines of the quatrain), it strongly conveys a sense of return, a sense of not going forward, even a sense of dwelling on the past. We give four examples of the form.

- If you are going to write a villanelle, here are two tips:

  - Begin by writing a couplet (a pair of rhyming lines); in fact, write several couplets on different topics, and then decide which couplet you think is most promising. Next, insert between these two lines a line that makes sense in the context but that does *not* rhyme with them.
  - Each line need not end with a pause, and in fact some run-on lines probably will help to prevent the poem from becoming too sing-songy.

DYLAN THOMAS

For a biographical note, see page 586.

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night [1952]

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

YOUR TURN

1. The intricate form of the villanelle might seem too fussy for a serious poem about dying. Do you find it too fussy? Or does the form here somehow succeed?
2. How would you describe the speaker's tone? Is it accurate or misleading to say that "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" is an angry poem?
3. What is the speaker's attitude toward death? Do you share this attitude or not? Please explain.
4. This is a famous poem. Why do you think that is the case?

ELIZABETH BISHOP

Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. Because her father died when she was eight months old and her mother was confined to a sanitarium four years later, Bishop was raised by relatives in New England and Nova Scotia. After graduation from Vassar College in 1934, where she was co-editor of the student literary magazine, she lived (on a small private income) for a while in Key West, France, and Mexico, and then for much of her adult life in Brazil, before returning to the United States to teach at Harvard. A one-volume collection of Bishop's work, Poems, Prose, and Letters, *has been published by the Library of America (2008).*

One Art

[1976]

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

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

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

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

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

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

YOUR TURN

1. What was your response to the title when you first read it? Did your response change after you read the poem and studied it further?
2. Is the form connected to the poem's theme? If so, in what way?
3. Linger over line 1: Why is "losing" an "art"? And why does Bishop echo the phrasing of the first line in lines later in the poem? Does the echo make the poem feel repetitive?
4. Follow Bishop's uses of the words "lose," "losing," and "loss" from one to the next. Do you find her reliance on these very closely related words to be important for the poem's meaning, or does it strike you as a lot or a little confusing? Can a poem be a lot or a little confusing and yet still be a good poem?
5. Can we tell what kind of loss Bishop is exploring? If we can, where does this kind of loss become clear?
6. Whom is Bishop addressing when she says (note the exclamation point) "*Write* it!"? Why is this command in the poem, and why is it in parentheses?
7. Has this poem helped you to understand a loss or losses that you have experienced yourself? Something, perhaps, that you did not understand before about what "losing" someone or something important means? Do you have an insight of your own into losing and loss that Bishop has not considered, at least not in this poem? Is this an insight that you would want to share with others—in a poem, for example—or keep to yourself?

The Sestina

This fiendishly elaborate form developed in twelfth-century Europe, especially in southern France, among the troubadours, court poets who sang for nobles. (The name comes from the Italian *sesto*, "sixth," because there are six stanzas of six lines each—but then, to complicate matters, there is a seventh stanza, a three-line "envoy" or "envoi," a summing up that uses key words of the first six stanzas.)

More precisely—this is mind-boggling—the six words that end the six lines of the first stanza are used at the ends of all the following lines but in a different though fixed order in each stanza. (Rhyme is *not* used in this form.) This fixed order has been characterized as a sort of bottoms-up pattern, a term that will become clear as we describe the stanzas. In the second stanza the *first* line ends with the *last* word of the *last* line (the bottom) of the first stanza; the second line of the second stanza ends with the first line of the first; the third line ends with the last word of the fifth line of the first stanza—i.e., with the next-to-bottom line of the first stanza. The fourth line of the second stanza ends with the second line of the first, the fifth with the fourth line of the first, and the sixth with the third line of the first.

Thus, if we designate the final words of the first stanza, line by line, as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,

the final words of the second stanza are 6, 1, 5, 2, 4, 3;
the third stanza: 3, 6, 4, 1, 2, 5
the fourth stanza: 5, 3, 2, 6, 1, 4
the fifth stanza: 4, 5, 1, 3, 6, 2
the sixth stanza: 2, 4, 6, 5, 3, 1

The envoy of three lines must use these six words, but there are various possible patterns—for instance, 5, 3, 1 at the ends of the three lines, and 2, 4, 6 in the middle of the lines.

If you are going to write a sestina, two tips:

- Once you have settled on your topic—let's say "loss" or "a restless spirit of adventure"—jot down six words that you think are relevant, and get going.
- You need not end each line with a pause, and in fact most good sestinas use considerable enjambment—i.e., the sense of the line runs over into the next line.

ELIZABETH BISHOP

For a biographical note, see page 682.

Sestina

[1965]

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother
sits in the kitchen with the child
beside the Little Marvel Stove,
reading the jokes from the almanac,
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house
were both foretold by the almanac,
but only known to a grandmother.
The iron kettle sings on the stove.
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears
dance like mad on the hot black stove,
the way the rain must dance on the house.
Tidying up, the old grandmother
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac
hovers half open above the child,
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
She shivers and says she thinks the house
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel° Stove.
I know what I know; says the almanac.
With crayons the child draws a rigid house
and a winding pathway. Then the child
puts in a man with buttons like tears
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

25 Marvel a brand of stoves and appliances.

But secretly, while the grandmother
busies herself about the stove,
the little moons fall down like tears
from between the pages of the almanac
into the flower bed the child
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

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YOUR TURN

1. Does Bishop's choice of title seem strange to you? Why would she use the name of the poetic form for her title? Do you think that a different title might be more effective? Please give examples, and explain why they would or would not be better.
2. As carefully as you can, describe the effect of line 1.
3. In the first stanza, why is the grandmother crying? How are her tears in lines 6 and 7 related to the "small hard tears" of the teakettle in line 14? Note, too, the later references to tears. Please comment on these as well.
4. Several of the lines in this poem are italicized. Do the italics make the lines more forceful? Should Bishop have made the force of the lines clear without changing the "look" of the lines on the page?
5. What is an almanac? Have you ever seen one? Why would someone want an almanac? What is the significance of the almanac in this poem?
6. What is your response to the fact that this poem is a sestina? Do you think you could write a poem in this form? What would be the benefit to you of such an assignment?

Shaped Poetry or Pattern Poetry

We have been talking about shapes or patterns determined by rhymes, but some poems—admittedly few—take their shape from the length of the lines, which form a simple image, such as a sphere, an egg, a vase, or a wing.

Here is a famous example of shaped poetry, a pair of wings. We print it sideways, as it was printed in the earliest edition, in 1633, though in that edition the first stanza was printed on the left-hand page, the second on the right-hand page.

GEORGE HERBERT

George Herbert (1593–1633), born into a distinguished Welsh family, studied at the University of Cambridge (England) and became a clergyman. By all accounts he lived an admirable life and was deservedly known in his community as "Holy Mr. Herbert."

Note: *In line 1,* store *means "abundance," "plenty." In line 10,* the fall *refers to the loss of innocence that resulted when Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. In the next-to-last line,* imp, *a term from falconry, means "to graft, to insert feathers into a wing."*

We print the poem in the way that it was originally printed.

Easter-Wings

[1633]

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poor:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

YOUR TURN

1. Why are wings especially relevant to a poem about Easter?
2. We don't think one can argue that the length of every line is exactly suited to the meaning of the line, but we do think that some of the lengths are parallel or reinforce some of the ideas within those lines. For instance, the first line, speaking of a man's original "wealth and store," is a long line. Why is this length more appropriate to the meaning than it would be to, say, "Lord, who created a man who soon would fall!"? And note especially the fifth and sixth lines of each stanza: Would you agree that their length suits their meaning?
3. Do you think this poem is a mere novelty, or do you think it deserves close attention and indeed is memorable? Please explain.

Blank Verse and Free Verse

A good deal of English poetry is unrhymed, much of it in **blank verse**—that is, unrhymed iambic pentameter. Introduced into English poetry by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, in the middle of the sixteenth century, late in the century it

became the standard medium (especially in the hands of Marlowe and Shakespeare) of English drama. In the seventeenth century, Milton used it for *Paradise Lost*, and it has continued to be used in both dramatic and nondramatic literature. For an example see the first scene of *Hamlet* (page 1001). A passage of blank verse that has a rhetorical unity is sometimes called a **verse paragraph.**

The second kind of unrhymed poetry fairly common in English, especially in the twentieth century, is **free verse** (or **vers libre**): rhythmical lines varying in length, adhering to no fixed metrical pattern and usually unrhymed. Such poetry may seem formless; Robert Frost, who strongly preferred regular meter and rhyme, said that he would not consider writing free verse any more than he would consider playing tennis without a net. But free verse does have a form or pattern, often largely based on repetition and parallel grammatical structure. Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider" (page 585) is an example; Arnold's "Dover Beach" (page 778) is another example, though less typical because it uses rhyme. Thoroughly typical is Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer."

WALT WHITMAN

For a biographical note, see page 633.

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer [1865]

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

What can be said about the rhythmic structure of this poem? Rhymes are absent, and the lines vary greatly in the number of syllables, ranging from 9 (the first line) to 23 (the fourth line), but when we read the poem we sense a rhythmic structure. The first four lines obviously hang together, each beginning with "When"; indeed, three of these four lines begin "When I." We may notice, too, that each of these four lines has more syllables than its predecessor (the numbers are 9, 14, 18, and 23); this increase in length, like the initial repetition, is a kind of pattern. But then, with the fifth line, which speaks of fatigue and surfeit, there is a shrinkage to 14 syllables, offering an enormous relief from the previous swollen line with its 23 syllables. The second half of the poem—the pattern established by "When" in the first four lines is dropped, and in effect we get a new stanza, also of four lines—does not relentlessly diminish the number of syllables in each succeeding line, but it *almost* does so: 14, 14, 13, 10.

The second half of the poem thus has a pattern too, and this pattern is more or less the reverse of the first half of the poem. We may notice too that the last line (in which the poet, now released from the oppressive lecture hall, is in communion with nature) is very close to an iambic pentameter line; that is, the poem

concludes with a metrical form said to be the most natural in English. The effect of naturalness or ease in this final line, moreover, is increased by the absence of repetitions (e.g., not only of "When I," but even of such syntactic repetitions as "charts and diagrams," "tired and sick," "rising and gliding") that characterize most of the previous lines. This final effect of naturalness is part of a carefully constructed pattern in which rhythmic structure is part of meaning. Though at first glance free verse may appear unrestrained, as T. S. Eliot (a practitioner) said, "No *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job"—or for the woman who wants to do a good job.

The Prose Poem

The term *prose poem* is sometimes applied to a short work that looks like prose but that is highly rhythmical or rich in images, or both. Here is a modern example.

CAROLYN FORCHÉ

Carolyn Forché was born in Detroit in 1950. After earning a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and a master's degree from Bowling Green State University, she traveled widely in the Southwest, living among Pueblo Indians. Between 1978 and 1986 she made several visits to El Salvador, documenting human rights violations for Amnesty International. Her first book of poems, Gathering the Tribes, *won the Yale Younger Poets award in 1975. Forché is the Director of the Lannan Center for Poetry and Poetics and holds the Lannan Chair in Poetry at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.*

The Colonel

[1978, publ. 1981]

What you have heard is true. I was in his house. His wife carried a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over the house. On the television was a cop show. It was in English. Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm

and held the last of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.

May 1978

YOUR TURN

1. How would you characterize the colonel in a few sentences?
2. We are told that the colonel spoke of "how difficult it had become to govern." What do you suppose the colonel assumes is the purpose of government? What do you assume its purpose is?
3. How much do we know about the narrator? Can we guess the narrator's purpose in visiting the colonel? How would you characterize the narrator's tone? Do you believe the narrator?
4. What is your response to the last sentence?
5. What, if anything, is gained by calling this work a "prose poem" rather than a short story?