



## One Art

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In “One Art,” Bishop, who was always interested in using formal techniques, uses the villanelle to give form to her thoughts on loss. The form requires that the first and third lines of the first stanza be used alternately as third-line refrains for the succeeding stanzas until the last stanza, which contains four lines, the last two of which repeat the refrain lines. As in this poem, the line length is commonly iambic pentameter, and the rhyme scheme for each triplet is *aba*. As with many writers of villanelles, Bishop alters some of the repeated lines instead of repeating precisely. Throughout much of the poem, her voice is flippant about the ease with which things get lost, things ranging from keys to time. In the fourth stanza, however, as she notes that she lost her mother's watch and a loved house, she sounds less willing to accept the loss. In the fifth, she says that losing two cities and an entire continent (probably a reference to her leaving Brazil) still was not a disaster, although such losses sound enormous to the reader. The last stanza is often taken to refer to the suicide of Bishop's Brazilian lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, the “you” the speaker says she has lost. However, when the speaker says that this shows that the art of losing is “not too hard to master,” her understatement suggests the opposite, as the poem concludes that the loss “may look like (Write it!) like disaster.” The parenthetical “Write it!” suggests one way to cope with disastrous losses—through art.

## Sources for Further Study

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