= Sestina =

A sestina (Old Occitan : cledisat [kledi?zat] ; also known as sestine , sextine , sextain) is a fixed verse form consisting of six stanzas of six lines each , normally followed by a three @-@ line envoi . The words that end each line of the first stanza are used as line endings in each of the following stanzas , rotated in a set pattern .

The invention of the form is usually attributed to 12th @-@ century troubadour Arnaut Daniel ; after spreading to continental Europe , it first appeared in English in 1579 , though sestinas were rarely written in Britain until the end of the 19th century . It remains a popular poetic form , and many continue to be written by contemporary poets .

= = History = =

The oldest @-@ known sestina is " Lo ferm voler qu 'el cor m 'intra " , written around 1200 by Arnaut Daniel , a troubadour of Aquitanian origin ; he refers to it as " cledisat " , meaning , more or less , " interlock " . Hence , Daniel is generally considered the form 's inventor , though it has been suggested that he may only have innovated an already existing form . Nevertheless , two other original troubadouric sestinas are known , the best known being " Eras , pus vey mon benastruc " by Guilhem Peire Cazals de Caortz ; there are also two contrafacta built on the same end @-@ words , the best known being Ben gran avoleza intra by Bertran de Born . These early sestinas were written in Old Occitan ; the form started spilling into Italian with Dante in the 13th century ; by the 15th , it was used in Portuguese by Luís de Camões .

The involvement of Dante and Petrarch in establishing the sestina form , together with the contributions of others in the country , account for its classification as an Italian verse form ? despite not originating there . The result was that the sestina was re @-@ imported into France from Italy in the 16th century . Pontus de Tyard was the first poet to attempt the form in French , and the only one to do so prior to the 19th century ; he introduced a partial rhyme scheme in his sestina .

= = = English = = =

The first appearance of the sestina in English print is " Ye wastefull woodes " , comprising lines 151 ? 89 of the August Æglogue in Edmund Spenser 's Shepherd 's Calendar , published in 1579 . It is in unrhymed iambic pentameter , but the order of end @-@ words in each stanza is non @-@ standard ? ending 123456 , 612345 , etc . ? each stanza promoting the previous final end @-@ word to the first line , but otherwise leaving the order intact ; the envoi order is (1) 2 / (3) 4 / (5) 6 . This scheme was set by the Spaniard Gutierre de Cetina .

Although they appeared in print later , Philip Sidney 's three sestinas may have been written earlier , and are often credited as the first in English . The first published (toward the end of Book I of The Countess of Pembroke 's Arcadia , 1590) is the double sestina " Ye Goatherd Gods " . In this variant the standard end @-@ word pattern is repeated for twelve stanzas , ending with a three @-@ line envoi , resulting in a poem of 75 lines . Two others were published in subsequent editions of the Arcadia . The second , " Since wailing is a bud of causeful sorrow " , is in the " standard " form . Like " Ye Goatherd Gods " it is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter and uses exclusively feminine endings , reflecting the Italian endecasillabo . The third , " Farewell , O sun , Arcadia 's clearest light " , is the first rhyming sestina in English : it is in iambic pentameters and follows the standard end @-@ word scheme , but rhymes ababcc in the first stanza (the rhyme scheme necessarily changes in each subsequent stanza , a consequence of which is that the 6th stanza is in rhyming couplets) . Sidney uses the same envoi structure as Spenser . William Drummond of Hawthornden published two sestinas (which he called " sextains ") in 1616 , which copy the form of Sidney 's rhyming sestina . After this , there is an absence of notable sestinas for over 250 years , with John Frederick Nims noting that , " ... there is not a single sestina in the three volumes of the Oxford anthologies that cover the seventeenth , eighteenth and nineteenth centuries . "

In the 1870s , there was a revival of interest in French forms , led by Andrew Lang , Austin Dobson

, Edmund Gosse , W. E. Henley , John Payne , and others . The earliest sestina of this period is Algernon Charles Swinburne 's " Sestina " . It is in iambic pentameter rhyming ababab in the first stanza ; each stanza begins by repeating the previous end @-@ words 6 then 1 , but the following 4 lines repeat the remaining end @-@ words ad lib ; the envoi is (1) 4 / (2) 3 / (5) 6 . In the same volume (Poems and Ballads , Second Series , 1878) Swinburne introduces a " double sestina " (" The Complaint of Lisa ") that is unlike Sidney 's : it comprises 12 stanzas of 12 iambic pentameter lines each , the first stanza rhyming abcabdcefedf . Similar to his " Sestina " , each stanza first repeats end @-@ words 12 then 1 of the previous stanza ; the rest are ad lib . The envoi is (12) 10 / (8) 9 / (7) 4 / (3) 6 / (2) 1 / (11) 5 .

From the 1930s , a revival of the form took place across the English @-@ speaking world , led by poets such as W. H. Auden , and the 1950s were described as the " age of the sestina " by James E. B. Breslin . " Sestina : Altaforte " by Ezra Pound and " Paysage moralisé " by W. H. Auden are distinguished modern examples of the sestina . The sestina remains a popular closed verse form , and many sestinas continue to be written by contemporary poets ; notable examples include " The Guest Ellen at the Supper for Street People " by David Ferry and " IVF " by Kona Macphee .

= = Form = =

Although the sestina has been subject to many revisions throughout its development there remain several features that define the form . The sestina is composed of six stanzas of six lines (sixains) , followed by a stanza of three lines (a tercet) . There is no rhyme within the stanzas ; instead the sestina is structured through a recurrent pattern of the words that end each line , a technique known as " lexical repetition " .

In the original form composed by Daniel , each line is of ten syllables , except the first of each stanza which are of seven . The established form , as developed by Petrarch and Dante , was in hendecasyllables . Since then , changes to the line length have been a relatively common variant , such that Stephen Burt has written : " sestinas , as the form exists today , [do not] require expertise with inherited meter ... " .

The pattern that the line @-@ ending words follow is often explained if the numbers 1 to 6 are allowed to stand for the end @-@ words of the first stanza . Each successive stanza takes its pattern based upon a bottom @-@ up pairing of the lines of the preceding stanza (i.e. , last and first , then second @-@ from @-@ last and second , then third @-@ from @-@ last and third) . Given that the pattern for the first stanza is 123456 , this produces 615243 in the second stanza .

Another way of visualising the pattern of line @-@ ending words for each stanza is by the procedure known as retrogradatio cruciata , which may be rendered as " backward crossing " . The second stanza can be seen to have been formed from three sets of pairs (6 ? 1 , 5 ? 2 , 4 ? 3) , or two triads (1 ? 2 ? 3 , 4 ? 5 ? 6) . The 1 ? 2 ? 3 triad appears in its original order , but the 4 ? 5 ? 6 triad is reversed and superimposed upon it .

The pattern of the line @-@ ending words in a sestina is represented both numerically and alphabetically in the following table :

The sixth stanza is followed by a tercet that is known variably by the French term envoi , the Occitan term tornada , or , with reference to its size in relation to the preceding stanzas , a " half @-@ stanza " . It consists of three lines that include all six of the line @-@ endings words of the preceding stanzas . This should take the pattern of 2 ? 5 , 4 ? 3 , 6 ? 1 (numbers relative to the first stanza) ; the first end @-@ word of each pair can occur anywhere in the line , while the second must end the line . However , the end @-@ word order of the envoi is no longer strictly enforced .

The sestina has been subject to some variations , with changes being made to both the size and number of stanzas , and also to individual line length . A " double sestina " is the name given to either : two sets of six six @-@ line stanzas , with a three @-@ line envoy (for a total of 75 lines) , or twelve twelve @-@ line stanzas , with a six @-@ line envoy (for a total of 150 lines) . Examples of either variation are rare ; " Ye Goatherd Gods " by Philip Sidney is a notable example of the former variation , while " The Complaint of Lisa " by Algernon Charles Swinburne is a notable example of the latter variation . In the former variation , the original pattern of line @-@ ending

words , i.e. that of the first stanza , recurs in the seventh stanza , and thus the entire change of pattern occurs twice throughout . In the second variation , the pattern of line @-@ ending words returns to the starting sequence in the eleventh stanza ; thus it does not , unlike the " single " sestina , allow for every end @-@ word to occupy each of the stanza ends ; end @-@ words 5 and 10 fail to couple between stanzas .

 A " tritina " is a contraction of the sestina to three stanzas of three lines (tercets) , with a one @-@ line envoy . The order of the line @-@ ending words follows the same pattern as that of the sestina , so that they appear : 123 , 312 , 231 with the envoy as 123 .

= = Effect = =

 The structure of the sestina , which demands adherence to a strict and arbitrary order , produces several effects within a poem . Stephen Burt notes that , " The sestina has served , historically , as a complaint " , its harsh demands acting as " signs for deprivation or duress " . The structure can enhance the subject matter that it orders ; in reference to Elizabeth Bishop 's A Miracle for Breakfast , David Caplan suggests that the form 's " harshly arbitrary demands echo its subject 's " . Nevertheless , the form 's structure has been criticised ; Paul Fussell considers the sestina to be of " dubious structural expressiveness " when composed in English and , irrespective of how it is used , " would seem to be [a form] that gives more structural pleasure to the contriver than to the apprehender . "

 Margaret Spanos highlights " a number of corresponding levels of tension and resolution " resulting from the structural form , including : structural , semantic and aesthetic tensions . She believes that the aesthetic tension , which results from the " conception of its mathematical completeness and perfection " , set against the " experiences of its labyrinthine complexities " can be resolved in the apprehension of the " harmony of the whole . "

 The strength of the sestina , according to Stephen Fry , is the " repetition and recycling of elusive patterns that cannot be quite held in the mind all at once " . For Shanna Compton , these patterns are easily discernible by newcomers to the form ; she says that : " Even someone unfamiliar with the form 's rules can tell by the end of the second stanza ... what 's going on ... " .