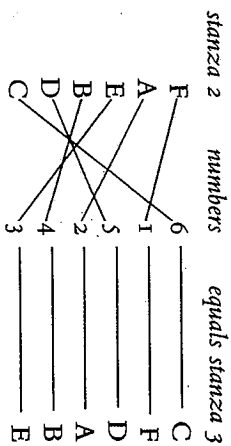
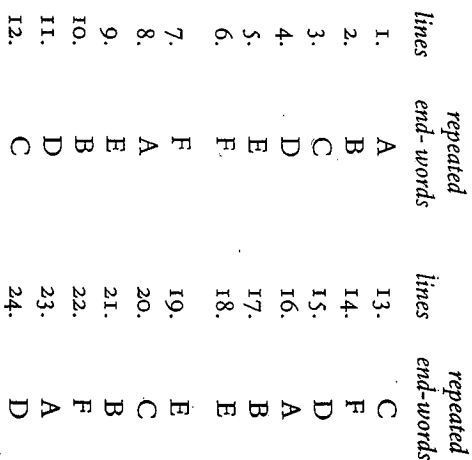


The order in which the end-words are re-used is prescribed by a set pattern lying in the numerological sequence 615243. If this set of numbers is applied to *each* stanza's set of end-words, it will be seen that these words appear in the succeeding stanza in this order. In other words, if the end-words of stanza one are designated ABCDEF, applying the set of numbers will give us stanza two, FAEBDC. Doing the same to stanza two results in the following:



The numerological significance of the set, however, has evidently been lost since the Middle Ages, though the form is perhaps the most popular of the French Provençal forms in the twentieth century (though the VILLANELLE runs it a close second). Here is the schematic diagram:



SESTINA

French. Syllabic or, in English meters, accentual-syllabic. Thirty-nine (39) lines divided into six SESTETS and one TRIPLET, called the *envoi*. The poem is ordinarily unrhymed. Instead of rhymes, the six *end-words* of the lines in stanza one are picked up and re-used, in a particular order, as end-words in the remaining stanzas. In the envoi, which ends the poem, the six end-words are also picked up: one end-word is buried in each line, and one end-word finishes each line. Lines can be of any single length; the length is determined by the poet.

	<i>repeated</i>		<i>repeated</i>
lines	<i>end-words</i>	lines	<i>end-words</i>
25.	D	31.	B
26.	E	32.	D
27.	A	33.	F
28.	C	34.	E
29.	F	35.	C
30.	B	36.	A
		37.	B
		38.	D
		39.	F
			E C A
			} <i>envoy</i>

Not content with the considerable difficulty of writing the *sestina* as prescribed, Swinburne made the following verse rhyme and meter as well, thus turning its stanzas into Sicilian *sestets*:

Sestina

I saw my soul at rest upon a day
 As a bird sleeping in the nest of night,
 Among soft leaves that give the starlight way
 To touch its wings but not its eyes with light;
 So that it knew as one in visions may,
 And knew not as men waking, of delight.
 This was the measure of my soul's delight;
 It had no power of joy to fly by day,
 Nor part in the large lordship of the light;
 But in a secret moon-beholden way
 Had all its will of dreams and pleasant night,
 And all the love and life that sleepers may.
 But such life's triumph as men waking may
 It might not have to feed its faint delight
 Between the stars by night and sun by day,
 Shut up with green leaves and a little light;
 Because its way was as a lost star's way,
 A world's not wholly known of day or night.
 All loves and dreams and sounds and gleams of night
 Made it all music that such minstrels may,

And all they had they gave it of delight;
 But in the full face of the fire of day
 What place shall be for any starry light,
 What part of heaven in all the wide sun's way?

Yet the soul woke not, sleeping by the way,
 Watched as a nursling of the large eyed night,
 And sought no strength nor knowledge of the day,
 Nor closer touch conclusive of delight,
 Nor mightier joy nor truer than dreamers may,
 Nor more of song than they, nor more of light.

For who sleeps once and sees the secret light
 Whereby sleep shows the soul a fairer way
 Between the rise and rest of day and night,
 Shall care no more to fare as all men may,
 But be his place of pain or of delight,
 There shall he dwell, beholding night as day.

Song, have thy day and take thy fill of light
 Before the night be fallen across thy way;
 Sing while he may, man hath no long delight.

—ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

New Collage Magazine, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1982, edited by A. McA. Miller, was a special "Sestina and Lines Issue," the lines having mainly to do with discussing the *sestina*. In this issue, Wesli Court published a *sestina* containing one or two features that, as in the Swinburne example above, are not traditional. First, the obsessive refrain, which is the first line, contains all six of the end-words, but each time the line is repeated the syntax is transposed by *hypallage*. Nonetheless, the line always makes sense, and it reappears a seventh time as a one-line *envoy* rather than as the normal three-liner, but with the sense of the original first line reversed:

The Obsession

Last night I dreamed my father died again,
 a decade and a year after he dreamed
 of death himself, pitched forward into night.

His world of waking flickered out and died—
 an image on a screen. He is the father
 now of fitful dreams that last and last.

I dreamed again my father died at last.
 He stood before me in his flesh again.
 I greeted him. I said, "How are you, father?"
 But he looked frailer than last time I'd dreamed
 we were together, older than when he'd died—
 I saw upon his face the look of night.

I dreamed my father died again last night.
 He stood before a mirror. He looked his last
 into the glass and kissed it. He saw he'd died.
 I put my arms about him once again
 to help support him as he fell. I dreamed
 I held the final heartburst of my father.

I died again last night: I dreamed my father
 kissed himself in glass, kissed me goodnight
 in doing so. But what was it I dreamed
 in fact? An injury that seems to last
 without abatement; opening again
 and yet again in dream? Who was it died

again last night? I dreamed my father died,
 but it was not he—it was not my father,
 only an image flickering again
 upon the screen of dream out of the night.
 How long can this cold image of him last?
 Whose is it, his or mine? Who dreams he dreamed?

My father died. Again last night I dreamed
 I felt his struggling heart still as he died
 beneath my failing hands. And when at last
 he weighed me down, then I laid down my father,
 covered him with silence and with night.
 I could not bear it should he come again—
 I died again last night, my father dreamed.

—WHSLI COURT