



Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century

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The sestina (of medieval French origin) is a complex poetic form of 39 lines (six sestets and a three-line “envoy”) in which the six end-words (teleutons) of the lines of the first sestet stanza are repeated in a specific order as teleutons in the five succeeding sestets. In the envoy, the six teleutons are again picked up, one of them being buried in, and one finishing, each line.

Because of the complexity of the form, the sestina fell out of favor with poets for several decades. However, a twenty-first century revival of the form is underway. This is the first anthology of sestinas that showcases both traditional and innovative examples of the form by modern and contemporary poets, award winners, and emerging writers alike. Organized by such themes as Americana; Art; Love and Sex; and Memory, Contemplation, Retrospection, and Death, the collection also includes sestinas with irregular teleutons and unconventional sestinas. An evocative introduction by Marilyn Krysl acquaints readers with the form. The volume concludes with useful indexes of first lines and teleutons, increasing access to the poems beyond the poets’ names.

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