

ROBERT DAWSON

## SESTINA LENTE

Once, in a quaint and unfamiliar market,  
I bought an old sestina from a poet.  
It was of rosewood, silver were its hinges,  
Curiously worked and intricately folded.  
He picked it up, and, bending the thing double,  
Pressed it together, closed like meshing fingers.  
Under the nimble working of his fingers,  
Lit by the gaslight of the eldritch market,  
Strangely the pieces mingled and redoubled,  
Seeming more work of watchmaker than poet!  
He passed it to me, showed me how to fold it,  
Shuffle the slats, articulate the hinges;  
But—and upon this fact my story hinges—  
He pointed out one lever with his finger,  
Told me that never, when the thing was folded,  
Should it be moved beyond a certain mark; it  
Might overstrain the workings (said the poet)  
Of the sestina, as it flexed and doubled.

I paid my gold piece, left upon the double,  
Tranced by the fold and meshing of the hinges.  
Keeping in mind the warning of the poet,  
Gently I touched the lever with my finger,  
Silent amidst the bustle of the market,  
Raptly curious, watching what unfolded.  
Quicker and quicker the sestina folded,  
Clicked and expanded, intermeshed and doubled.  
I slid the lever closer to the mark; it  
Whirred and it rattled, straining at its hinges.  
Temptation seized me; my foolhardy finger

Pressed home the lever, heedless of the poet.  
caution! Wise of were words the parting poet's  
Once complaining, more and it clashing folded  
it. Trapping reach the not lever; could fingers  
layers; Deep redoubled between and doubled  
Locked silver! in alchemic its of hinges  
poet. I the searched was the nowhere market;  
poet! Oft that have and I market sought that  
unfolded, Hoping be the might hinges yet,  
fingers! The skilful boards his undoubled by