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## **Five Poems**

Noel Sloboda

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Five Poems

Noel Sloboda

*Language Games*

Nobody at school cared  
how Hermine Piribauer felt

when Herr Wittgenstein seized  
her pale, little lobes

and her head leaked crimson  
and rheum—

until she spit out  
the shattered gears

of a broken word machine  
and everybody shared

a shredded silence.

*Another Vocation*

Later, Mr. Getz claimed his mother  
never had such an episode before,  
certainly never back when  
she was teaching. No damage  
had been done, he maintained,  
that day he brought her  
to Life Skills II, to discuss  
the nature of a calling.

He had not even introduced her  
when she charged like a bee  
straight toward the board,  
scrawled pale hieroglyphics  
across the emptiness:  
"femina est mater," slashes  
between each word, a "haec"  
dangling on a noose below.

She buzzed about the function  
of the demonstrative  
as Getz clutched her arm,  
moved swiftly toward the door—  
past row upon row of students  
waiting for a lesson to start.

*Mechanical Muses*

After robots took over the planet,  
I alone was kept alive to produce  
verses in honor of circuits and steel.

The leaders of the new regime reasoned  
art was important for an empire—  
but they needed a human touch.

I told them I would only help  
if they supplied the raw material:  
the breath of a lover warming my cheek;  
a grimalkin who knew my secret name;  
and fourteen times my weight in butterflies.

Inhaling the dark tendrils of smoke  
that escaped those spinning, metal heads,  
I tasted the sweetness of a poem  
forming upon my tongue.

*Note to Edgar Allan Poe*

When you shared how  
howls followed nightmares

puncturing the membrane  
of our waking world

you should have warned me  
about all those echoes.

*Doggerel*

Tired of sad, questioning stares  
as I nightly hunched over the keyboard,  
I taught the dog to write poetry.

I meant to try his spirit—  
always over-brimming with hope—  
with writer's block and rejection slips.

But he displayed more tenacity  
than I had expected: chased  
leads, kept up a daily routine,

even attended a few workshops.  
When acceptances rolled in  
from journals I couldn't crack,

I didn't know what to think:  
Had I trained him too well?  
Or did he just have better instincts?