

CHRISTOPHER VENTER [FIVE TIMES]

THE EDWARD R. & FRANCES SCHREIBER COLLINS LITERARY PRIZE IN POETRY

five times. He scrubs his hands
to kill pentagram germs. His life goal is
not easily achieved. Microscopic holocaust is
his quest. He is devoted to
five evil cells. His flesh burns, gnawed by
persistent washing. His only weapon is
green lava soap. Nothing tops
an anthem in 5/4 time. He scours to
old albums by Brubeck. *Time Out* is the best of his
school traumas. Hours spent in corners were
a blessing. Isolation is
clean and comforting. These memories are
something worth saving. Papers from May 5th are
kept safely sealed. He is
scraps of paper in plastic bags. He often rubs
pens between his fingers. He scribes stars with
his breath as he breathes out. He pictures
his mind is a pentangle. Mom says he'll burn, saying
he hates crosses. He hates that
the Cross is made of four arms. He is ashamed that
he can't make it five. With all his will
he wishes to be saved. He tells God
and he goes to a new church. Father yells
and he drives off doing fifty. He is stopped for speeding
repeatedly. At home, he punishes his hands

Five Times is a Circuit poem. Although it can be read straight through, each line, or circuit, loops back on itself. That is, the end of each line can be read straight through to the next line or back to the beginning of that same line (e.g., He is devoted to his quest/ He is devoted to five evil cells).