

CHAMPION POEMS

#1

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Selected Poems from the
Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry
Competition (July 2009)

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Contents

Foreword	VI
Coffee (1st Prize Winner) – Miles Cain	1
Enemy Funeral (2nd Prize Winner) – Miles Cain	3
The God of Allotments (3rd Prize Winner) – Mandy Pannett	4
Leaning into the Afternoon – Danny Bird	5
Summer 1990 – Teodora Totorean	6
The Frog Population – L.S. Mensah	7
A House by the Sea – Thomas Gayton	8
In Frome – Graham Burchell	10
The Maternity Leave – Miles Cain	11
The Sorrowful Wheel – Peter Wyton	12
Hood (The Outlaw Blues) – Stephen Holloway	13
Speed Bumps – Andy Humphrey	14
Undine – Noel Williams	15
Havin Fon – Charles Evans	16
I would Like ... – June Drake	17

The Rooks of Killarney	18
- Andy Humphrey	
Evolution	19
- Ellaraine Lockie	
Thank you for the Music	20
- Noel King	
Skin Shedding	21
- Janey Francis	
A Bullet Regrets its Existence	22
- Miles Cain	
On Heat	23
- Janey Francis	
Tom Buchan: Missing Poet	24
- Michael Pedersen	
Equiano Meets Mama Lot	25
- L.S. Mensah	
The Convulsionary	26
- Peter Wyton	
Predator	28
- Gabrielle Meadows	
The Shrine	29
- Kai Beanland	
Right of Way	30
- L.S. Mensah	
Against the Locust - A Spell	32
- L.S. Mensah	
Last Goodbye	33
- Janey Francis	
The House	34
- Michael Yates	

Encounters with Crows	36
- Ellaraine Lockie	
Vinyl Groove	38
- Avril Staple	

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we introduce the poems and poets in this magazine. As judges of the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (July 2009) we were stunned by the quality and diversity of the entries which shows the e-magazine has an informed, eclectic and passionate readership. The poems in this magazine range from the expression of deep personal feelings, through vernacular and post modern word play to the socially and historically engaged. Obviously in selecting the winners there was some level of subjectivity involved and other judges could well have chosen any of these poems in the magazine as the overall winner. It is fair to say that when we were running our creative writing magazine 'KENAZ' we would have accepted any of the following poems for publication and indeed some of those that didn't make the short list.

The Sentinel Poetry Movement sets out to promote literary, cultural diversity and cross fertilization of traditions. This collection is clear evidence of the fruitful results of such an approach and along with the thriving underground live scene in the U.K. at the moment sets a challenge to a definition of poetry that focuses upon anaemic intellectualism that fails to connect with a wider readership.

As the late great Adrian Mitchell wrote *'Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people.'*

We hope this collection goes some way to remedy this, reaches far and wide and acts as a clarion call for a

new vital and vibrant scene where the spoken and the written word merge. Come and join the Sentinel Poetry Movement.

Andy Willoughby & Bob Beagrie

MILES CAIN

Coffee

Lip to neck and arse by thigh,
We almost choked on each other,
Our breath ferocious in a war
To stay human.
I was starving for home.

The smells stayed immobile
In groaning air. Human debris
And the reek of coffee.

We murmured in darkness,
Creaked with timbers,
Craved a hard breeze.
When they let us on deck
We filled it like flies
At the eye of a horse.
Tongues swollen,
Eyes shrunk,
The waves were tempting.

After docking,
We were shoved, bossed,
Dressed up, starched.

Groomed for parlours,
We stood in shadowed rooms,
Kept tight in cuffs and collars.
I waited near tables,
Poured coffee
Into pale cups and thought
Of skin and coins.

I served it with silver spoons to
Giggling ladies
With small and pretty eyes.

I saw the floor,
Remembered my fine brother,
His bold face. His big hands.
I thought of winds twitching at the shore,
The heat in plantation,
The sun on bare leaves.

The distance between
Covered truth and blinding sorrow.
Who fetches coffee
And who drinks it.

MILES CAIN

Enemy Funeral

After the planes had gone,
And the supply trucks skidded north
Towards the city,
We arrived and gathered what remained
Amongst the charcoal and ash,
Cradled them in our arms,
And pushed them into a neat pile.

The sergeant swamped fixed mouths
And bleached navels
With gasoline,
Spat and flipped his lighter.

We shuffled back a little
As eyeballs clicked and bones boomed.
Otherwise, they kept quiet.

We were grateful for the pure heat
Of the desert afternoon.
With some of the ashes that remained
The sergeant brewed coffee
And we passed a cup around.

We licked our lips
And looked at the horizon.
There were piles like this one in the distance -
Bent spirals of smoke
Marking a border of a kind.

MANDY PANNETT

The God of Allotments

We were lovers for forty years.
Now you are dead.

Here, on this patch of allotment, others
Will grow the scarlet runners, loving their blossom,
Like you.

Why did we keep it a secret?
Guilt at renegeing on vows?

Someone is threading up silver CDs in a bid to frighten the birds.
'Mirrors for pigeons,' you'd say.

I don't even know if they scattered your ashes or when.

Remembered our shed - how we'd pretend
To be sorting out seeds and the door would casually
Close?

At times I thought the walls themselves would collapse.

Shall I go down to our pond?
That very last time it was covered in scum.
You said it was hot, kept coughing -

Were you dying and I didn't know?

There's no one to talk to now, about you.
Only the god of allotments,
If he is in.

We always thought there'd be time for us -
At least for mingling our dust together,
As lovers do.

DANNY BIRD

Leaning into the Afternoon

After Pablo Neruda

The sea gull that sleeps
In the sunset of your eyelash,
That then wakes to flash an Arco
Through the clear glass of the soul.
That plucks the sky's tethered strings
With the flicker of its bow,
And folds the sounds inside my chest,
Like light splashing its surf
Over peals of sun-drenched sand,
Or else flourishing through crystal veins
Of jagged spears of rock.

The sand, the rocks, the morning,
All leaning, feather-flecked,
Into that bare blue afternoon,

Waiting for night to fasten its lips
To the footsteps of day,
To wrap the stars
And shed its tassels
Beneath the finger of the moon,

And for a single tear to slip and fall
And slowly become an ocean.

Teodora Totorean

Summer 1990

I nearly drowned in the black sea
And I can swear I saw my all life
In front of my closed eyes (no-one ever believed me)
Like a well known movie that makes you tremble.
People I knew, objects, things that happened,
The way I felt, I talked, all the words I ever said,
The trees that used to grow from my fingers,
My friends, my enemies, my unborn child,
Sequences of life and feelings mixed all together
Like a cake's ingredients or a soup's,
Like a vortex of dizziness and sweet sleep;
But I didn't see the famous light,
Nor the hope that someone would save me.
Panic ... and then I remember silence.
The quietness, people stopped moving and talking,
The salty water, the waves above me
Trying to wipe out my memory, my shadow.
I gave up fighting; I was the closest to death,
The beautiful, peaceful, and calm end.
(I come from a culture where our ancestors
Knew the secret to a happy death.)
It was my father's hand that saved me
And when I opened my eyes, just sadness
Because what I'd seen was so much better:
The world that lived inside me. And now
I don't know how long I have to wait
Until I get the chance to see it again.

L.S. Mensah

The Frog Population

A cold snap
Is often all
It takes to cost
The frog population.

One comes upon the frost-ravaged
Spawn, so chilled it yields
A harvest of stillborn tadpoles,
Hieroglyphed into the iced pane,
Where it glazes some garden pond.

One notices similar caesurae
Enjambed into the soul
Where a node was pruned
Too quickly, to stop the gurgling
Gangrene, so that the tissue atrophied.

THOMAS GAYTON

A House by the Sea

Sometimes I can hear the sea
From my back garden.
My house is nowhere near the coast
But it's always there
In the distance, washing in
And out.

Even when I go out
In the evening, I can see
Gulls soaring in
Towards my house
Where their
Nests lie. Coastlines

Are eroded through my garden.
Coasting Waves head towards the flowerbeds, then out
Again. They're
Not bothered about damages: why would the sea
Be concerned with my house
When it drifts in and out?

Fishermen always arrive when I'm not in,
Their vessels moored at the coast.
They appear, trudging sea water into my house
For a cup of tea before the catch comes out.
I often catch them in the distance, the sea
Splashing around their

Boats that sit there,
While the waves slosh. But in-
Side they barely notice the sea
That throws them towards the coast
And then back out,
Away from the house.

The waters house

Dangerous beasts in their
Depths, swimming out
When the tide is in
They rarely witness the coast,
But sometimes I see
Them there, deep out
In the sea, away from the coast.
Out there in their house.

GRAHAM BURCHELL

In Frome

Above the telescope shop above
The July heat and bustle
Of an artisan's market squeezed
Against each wall of its lane
Where wheels bump and feet scuffle
On cobbles, a window is open
Like a burst blister to the air.
There, a potted orchid jars
Against its socket of a room
To look down on us all
With a fading pink puff bloom;
The face of an old lady
Whose powdered expression is disdain,
Sad certain the her Sunday stillness
Of church, silent brick, bees
And best dress will never come again.

MILES CAIN

The Maternity Leave

Before the interview
We swapped stories,
Drank amiable coffees,
Chatted. Agreed.

Then she grew a child
And I sought a borrowed status.
At the interview she watched the floor.
I got the job. Her smiles dried up.

I did the work. Sat in her chair,
Pawed her filing.
Tapped at her keyboard.
Read her notes.

She came back. We met.
She was cool, landing questions
Like punches. I fidgeted for answers.
The air between us began to grow hard.

PETER WYTON

The Sorrowful Wheel

What early hunter-gatherers ignored, sun and moon sufficing
For their purposes, tribal descendants took more notice of
Witness a lunar calendar, traced along an eagle's bone
The better part of twenty thousand years ago.
That which priests incised on sandstone dials,
Science subsequently butchered into joints of hours,
Collop minutes diced to mincemeat seconds.
The concept Galileo hung a gutsy pendulum upon,
Clock-watchers ornamented with a face and hands,
Crucified against tall towers and public buildings,
Subjugated to the grind of regulating lifestyles.
Soon the fashion industry weighed in, displayed it
Trophy fashion, first on mantle-pieces, then on wrists.
Domesticated, digitised, expressed most recently
In micro-micro terms, the bull we've yoked for centuries
Seems unaccountably to have lost contact with
Its wilder, more substantial alter ego, somewhere
At the back of beyond in the china shop of the universe,
Synchronising spectacular collisions, infinitesimally
Adjusting orbits of immense, onrushing objects.
Sooner or later the brute beast we think we've hobbled
For the remainder of eternity will snap its chains.
All our clocks will stop, the day time catches up with us.

STEPHEN HOLLOWAY

Hood (The outlaw Blues)

You see this; it's misunderstood
Man it's just a hood
A big part of my attire
But it's starting to conspire
Against me and my generation
Next there will be legislation
By the men in suits Westminster brutes!
I mean check out their gear
That's the look of fear
We don't make no wars
Give me girls and dance floors
So I can live as a young man
Without a plan
In an existence of pleasure
Sometimes in excess
Often reckless
But no threat to national security
At my tender age only purity
And respect is good enough
But what about love?
Is there any left
Must I be bereft
Of mutual understanding
With our elders demanding
We keep in the line
So you see my decline
Will make me retreat to my disguise:
My hood is a compromise.

ANDY HUMPHREY

Speed Bumps

He's had plenty of practice
Getting over speed bumps,
Aligning careering wheels just so.

Once, this estate was Vegas,
Monte Carlo, Blackpool, Christmas lights
Garish with hope. Tonight,

It's all no-entries, cul-de-sacs,
Each February house-front empty grey,
Each hedge a frost-rimmed fence.

This chassis shudders familiar clunks
As headlights dash zig-zag paths
Across dark windscreens, flashing eyes

Of cats. Exhaust's underbelly
Scrapes flinty sparks, tyres sulphur-scuff
Chill asphalt. Roads fold back upon roads

Through dead suburban night, his engine's
Growl, his judder, the sole sensation
Of motion, of being alive.

NOEL WILLIAMS

Undine

Tossing Prada stilettos into a pool,
Gnurling her toes into sand moon-white,
Stripping Cardin and Janet Raeger
As she strides to the night sea -
So it licks her heels,
So it wrestles her knees,
So it breathes at her breast,
Steeping her eyes, as her hair trawls stars
In slick foils of unfolding acceptance;
She drinks the salt that swallows her,
Bare as a bird,
Her heart flickering, a fish.

CHARLES EVANS

Havin Fon

By the roadside, a shack,
Heat beat on the tin roof.
Outside, dusty in noon sun,
A figure carved in wood
Whose huge phallus,
Buried in a body
Bent double with stiff arms
And braced legs,
Urged a single agony,
The rictus smiles, above, below,
Gouged like a grimace.

I climbed rickety steps,
Ducked into the shade,
Brushed past gaudy wares
To where she sat,
Heaped like a sack
On the small stool, black, sweating,
Fan flapping the thick flies.
Somewhere the music beat tinnily.
I pointed to the twisted figures.
She looked at me, shrugged, spoke:
They havin fon.

JUNE DRAKE

I Would Like

I would like her to make
Silly noises at the baby,
Cuddle him, knit garments,
Take him to the park in the pram.
I would like her to sit with Bill:
At eight he plays table games
And knows to play fair, not cheat.
I would like her to meet me
And my friends for lunch,
Be able to share some times with us
And be part of a caring family.

Instead she wears a languid look,
Ignores all the children,
Walks away when I'm talking.
She'll call out to strangers,
Pretend she knows them of old
From some place far away.
But They never travelled, her and dad,
Stuck in a mould of contentment
Here, with his Morris Minor car,
Garden hut and large allotment
That meant hard work and fresh veg.

When she spots red socks
And best dress, we giggle,
(it's not funny but that's pardonable
If you learn to laugh, not cry.)
Today it is vest over blouse,
Tomorrow maybe some other thing
That her brain turns upside down
To fling her into disarray.
It is the lack of love that hurts
Not just the mess this person is.
I would like my mother back.

ANDY HUMPHREY

The Rooks of Killarney

It's March, early Sunday morning.
The town is hibernating.
Silent shop windows, cobwebbed
With last summers shamrocks,
Look out on pavements cold
With the fossils of fag-ends.
A newly washed sun
Dazzles silver-bright in last nights puddles;
But there are warnings of gales to come
And the crisp sugar-dust
Of snow on the hilltops
Shows winter is still in charge here.

It is the rooks who rule the town now:
Congregating in a churchyard fir tree
Garrulous with their plainchant.
They garrison the walls,
Flinty beaks keeping sentry;
Flock on roof tops, festooning eaves
With the morbid bunting of their wings.
They line the verges like hitch-hikers,
Stand watch on signposts, living arrows:
Tralee, Listowel, Kenmare, Cork
Encompassed in a wingspan.

Halfway down the windy Muckross road
Four old ladies shuffle towards church:
Same duffle coats, identical snow-grey perms
Stooped to the wind as if to the priest.
They've made there way, for all I know,
Inch after inch up this rocky, storm -lashed road
Every Sunday for seventy years
To hallow the church with their presence.
Tough old birds, these.

ELLARAINÉ LOCKIE

Evolution

Even Casanova's poetic account
Of what happened under Maria Maddelena's habit
Skirts up and her holding a rosary
His hunger for one of Christ's brides

Can't keep me from glancing at the bedroom
Window between every page-turn at 2.00 a. m.
Watching for the serial killer who governs the media
A monarchal ghost marching
His reign of terror across my back patio

What I hear is not the rustle of pyracantha
Against glass but wildebeest screams
In a Masai Mara night outside my cabin
The last hour of life as a hyena
Pulls out the entrails
Slow and messy like the suck
Of spaghetti one strand at a time
And I give-in to the inevitability of it all

The need of a hawk to systematically pull feathers
From a sparrow before eating it alive
Or a kea to attach itself to the back
Of a sheep and hammer beak to kidneys

A deviant rabbit that eats her own young
The pyromaniac and pedophile
The priest who ministered the slow crush
Of Maria's foot in Spanish iron boot

I surrender to dichotomy
To the world and the obscure wisdom of its creator
Throw in my gun and ammunition
And with arms over head
Walk into that place of peace in dreams
Where maybe Casanova waits

NOEL KING

Thank you for the music

We are death-clearing
Our parent's home.

In the garage one white key
Off our piano
Turns up
My sister goes white.

Why did he break it up?

A black key emerges in the garden
Rotted and chewed
By a dog or something.

My sibling shivers
Finding an antique piano leg
Propping a fuel-shed worktop.

He told us he'd sold it!

Da'd hated the piano,
Wanted me to football
Not have Ma make us learn.

Now I cry.
My sister too.
We hold each other.

JANEY FRANCIS

Skin shedding

As he ran his hand down her back,
Her old skin fell to the floor
With a dry rustle.
She stepped out of it shyly.

Her old skin fell to the floor
Like pieces of faded parchment,
The old story lay at her feet.
Unsure of being seen I her newness,
She hesitated to meet his gaze.

The old story lay at her feet,
A disguise no longer needed.
She hesitated to meet his gaze
Until she saw delight in his eyes.

A disguise no longer needed,
Deceived by herself, she hadn't known,
Until she saw delight in his eyes,
Just how beautiful she was.

Deceived by herself, she hadn't known
Until he reached for her
Just how beautiful she was
And how she could dance in his arms.

The old skin blew away on the wind
With a dry rustle.
She was shimmering light
As he ran his hand down her back.

MILES CAIN

A Bullet Regrets its Existence

It's not the speed
Or force that I resent.
It's not the months of waiting
In dark warehouses, the air
Loaded with oil and grease,
Or that thoughtless slamming
Through the air, just the once,
The wind a shrill
Streak of sound
Resisting my motion.

It's not the missing
Of targets, or the lying,
Spent, in a dry field,
Half a mile from flames
At midnight. It's not that.

But usefulness,
That's a thing to consider.
We could have been so much,
Myself, my cousins in Africa, Europe.
All that potential hiding
In lead and copper.
Ballast for boats. Pipes for water.
Beds for the sick and injured.
Air ambulances.
Something with a point.

JANEY FRANCIS

On Heat

The mask I feel drawn on my face
Comes from my father's line.
It is the complete despising of passion
And its movement through sinew and flesh.
This down-turned set of mouth and jar
Forbids the natural pleasures of the body
Which, all the while, pulses in the veins?
Beats in the heart, sweats on the skin.
An animal heart causes the mask to slip
And I am like a feral cat, sniffing the air
For the scent of lust and longing.

MICHAEL PEDERSEN

Tom Buchan (1931-1995): 'missing poet'

Tom wrote poems like fantastic pointing fingers
'Straight, strong and complex'
As Glasgow.

Tom wrote pulsing prose with pursed lips
Served verities caked in salt, bent rules
Beautifully;

Was captain of a body well lived in
Chipped teeth, fractured bone; enough
About his vessel.

Buchan's truth was truth, his conscience an eastern
Western blend — so like comets flew he spoke, in the heydays
And the greydays;

He moved as a great touring caravan, compass pointing
Alpine north. 7 foot they say, a strident mammoth
A turtle-necked warrior.

It's possible we were, at some point, synched
In time and place: tectonically on the promenade
Pittville Street, Portobello;

Perhaps too shared insights on a story
Spotted the same flying kite, rogue seagull or submarine
Emerge from the Firth.

It bends wits, brooding over
What forces lobbied night sky to swallow
Up a brightest star.

As to how such verve came to plunge
Like a rusty anchor into fierce waters
The mind boggles.

The mind boggles.

L. S. MENSAH

Equiano meets Mama Lot

Equiano to Mama Lot:

The order to vacate must
Have milked
Your heart of its ballast

When the firestorm,
Imbued with the arrogance
Of totems, first propped the sky

Only to mock your flight, to lick
The fingerprints of your footsteps
Until you turned

To scan Sodom's hind horizon,
To investigate the entrails of the flame

Mrs Lot, who wouldn't wish a mother
Like you, even if the payment
Was a sculpture of salt?

Mama Lot to Equiano:

I met her once - your mother, in the company
Of searchers - her voice hoarse; crocheted
With the grief that chewed her through,
Like the beetle chews through standing Forests.

She became a pilgrim of market places,
Uprooting auction blocks for the faintest traces
Of your sister and you. Your loss was the fire
That singed her, and like me she became salt; Of a kind.

Your mother, is the atoll that flags that volcanic past
Matrix of all those left to weep, over graves with no bodies.
But you too, are salt, for did you not taste the brine of the
Mighty Atlantic, that great sonneteer of salt?

PETER WYTON

The Convulsionary

In his own lifetime, as much as today, Samuel Johnson had a deserved reputation as an unparalleled man of words. His acquaintances, however, remembered him as much for his extraordinary method of public perambulation, as for his elocution.

Here comes, advances, issues forth,
The incomparable, the matchless, the nonpareil,
Our doyen of the dictionary, our lexicographer, our verbalist,
Doctor Samuel Johnson,
Blundering, clodhopping, lumbering,
Clumsily, peripatetically, uncouthly.
Every so often, from time to time, periodically,
He cessates, stops, terminates,
Abruptly, unexpectedly, without warning.

Insensible of, oblivious to, unheeding of
The great unwashed, the hoi-polloi, the rabble
Gaping, gawking, rubbernecking,
He contorts, twists, wrenches
His appendages, extremities, limbs
Into disparate, heterogeneous, miscellaneous
Attitudes, postures, stances,
As though attacked seized, stricken
By a constriction, cramp, spasm,
In advance of, in anterior to, prior to
Bounding, springing, precipitating
Himself ahead, forward, onwards
As if nothing abnormal, atypical, untoward
Had happened, occurred, taken place.

At this juncture, point, stage,
You might be acquitted, excused, forgiven
For cogitating, conjecturing, thinking
That he was a dunderhead, nitwit, simpleton,
But David Garrick, William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds,
To denominate, dub, name
A few, a handful, a sprinkling

Of his contemporaries, fellows, peers
Would animadvert, opine, say
That you were speaking, talking, uttering
Balderdash, bilge, bollocks.

GABRIELLE MEADOWS

Predator

There's a purpose in the air

The flickering of your eyelid is a warning
Fingers find their hot trance

Airborne on my jar line
At a space where ovals meet

The second's heap up
And with fluorescence I could draw
Your outline in the night

At each first meeting
Like the last
We move
Against the bowl's edge

Your footsteps at my tail

KAI BEANLAND

The shrine

On my way to work
I paused at the junction on Thomas Street,
Where a man was shot dead last year,
Looked to my left, to where his shrine now lay,
Its flowers wilting in the morning breeze;
A painful memory turning to dust,
Letters smudged, a photograph blurred by oozing ink.

The fallen rain.

As the lights drew red, I walked to my right
Through a rusty gate
To where a canopy of trees drew me into a shadowed maze
Of fallen leaves,
Autumnal shades mashed into the frozen ground.
As I walked, I came into a clearing of light,
There, I saw the sun rise into the distance.
The glare scorched the waters
Of a motionless lake; I blinked,
Drew in my breath -

The sky became dark.

Later, I would serve coffees to men in suits,
Flavoured lattes to women with pursed lips
And impatient stares.
Now, I stand in awe
Beneath the fires of the firmament:
Alone upon the wintered ground,
Where wolves once roamed
And forests grew,
And men huddled together for
Warmth, and ate -
Under the dawn of a different time.

L.S. MENSAH

Right of Way

Journeying through space I stepped on Mars;
Martians circle, pause as if to pose
The right question:

Are you from near here?

The Asteroid Belt.

Is that another planet?

In interplanetary space.

Their whispers trip,
One over another
Like a river in haste
To discover the sea
Before the rains
Rupture its banks:

*We have to ask you see...
Mars is overwhelmed by non Martians...
No knowledge of our ways ...
Our particular ways ...*

I shave off their murmurings
To walk straight, cobbled roads
Laid out for non Martian feet
For the red dust of Mars
Can only be raised by Martians

And from the junction
Of my eyelids
I note the slight twitch
Of old lace, as worried
Martians trained their
Binocularized gaze on me

And the echo that sprouted
Back to me, was the distillation
Of their thoughts- tart and tangy
As the sugar cane wine that bums

The rear wall of the soothsayer's throat
When he drinks to his guardian spirits:

*We have to watch you see ...
For the right to step on Mars...
Excludes the right to make a turn.
For the right to step on Mars...
Excludes the right to raise red dust.*

L.S. MENSAH

Against the Locust - A spell

When I see
The wink of lightning,
I know the thunder's
Voice will break

Oh locust, I have seen
Your swarms turn
In the breeze, but you will
Not have my grain

No matter how fast,
How furious the river,
It never wets the pebbles' Core.
I've heard rumours

Of your belligerence,
And know you to be
The drought's own
Bastard child,

Still, my grain is not
For your kind
Oh renegade insect, I sentence you
To brood, in the intestines of hyenas.

JANEY FRANCIS

Last Goodbye

She is gone. My resting place. My refuge.

All the phone calls when she called me darling.
All the conversations going round and
Round with her memory loss, but comforting ...
Smallest details: TV programs watched and
Sleep disturbed, uncomfortable armchair,
Carers being kind. This one room living.

Visits bringing flowers, new pyjamas,
Crosswords, longed for company and chatting.
Tearful goodbyes, whispered words of love,
Little kisses and the wrench inside of
Never knowing - would it be the last time?

Last time she had slipped into silence,
Lost to consciousness but heart still beating,
Breathing like a great long-distance runner,
Finishing line in sight for three long days,
Then alone, the early morning leaving,
Gone into the mystery, the long road
Home.

Now I must find another shelter —
My own life that stretches out before me.

MICHAEL YATES

The House

Stone cannot see, but stone absorbs
And changes through the chemical reaction
With water, air, people.
So I who am stone have changed as you have changed.

My infancy was church Latin and chain mail.
When you shared me with the animals.
Now, after a thousand years, you share me with the machines.
Sheep, goats, hens and hawks
All give way to electric points.

I was gentrified in Georgian times,
My ribcage splinted with oak beams,
The timber taken from ships,
So I grew used to the taste of sea salt.

When you grew tired of water from the well,
You envated me with cast iron pipes
So rivers flowed through my new arteries,
Full of peat and fed worms.

One of you to win back his wife
Turned my cowshed and loft
Into kitchen and bathroom
To no avail.
A good house is the setting for love
But not its source.

It is hard to know surgery from assault.
When a heinkel exploded in the field above
It tore my roof with fuselage and bullets.
And when you new-lined my chimney
You took away twelve barrow loads
Of soot and jackdaw nests
That I had grown fond of.

Where do you end and I begin?
When claw foot bath gives way to Jacuzzi,
Outside squatters to inside flush,
Truth and heather thatch to slate and insulation,
Herringbone stone to brick and plasterboard,

Then I will be changed and so will you.

Humans see and humans absorb
And change through chemical reaction
With water, air and stone.
But you and I shall not be fossilised.

ELLARAINÉ LOCKIE

Encounters with Crows

The caw-caw that grated like sandpaper
Came from a squatter crow in the acacia tree
Too close and aggressive to be conversational
An adrenaline needle plunged into memory
Of a black storm a foot from my face
Eyes as still as the storm's centre
offset by slap of wings and flap of beak

The caw-caw a cross between thunder and threat
The cause of a daily walk with weapons
An umbrella or baseball bat
And the armour of a wide-brimmed hat
And yet the pummeling from my own heart
The rock of dread so heavy and deep that Hitchcock
Has buried his playground scene under it

These ghosts do not rest in peace
They peck away in want of recognition
For the job of nature's clean-up crew
For transforming death into life
They want awareness for black bigotry
And encroachment of orchards and fields
From those who hear the unnerving calls but not
The varied clicks rattles and bell-like tones
Ignored by those who mistake the need for nest hair
As an act of aggression

One morning the sky blurs with half notes
Airwaves carry a cacophony of caws
In the oak tree hundreds of crows
Hunch their shoulders with each cry
Sandpaper sound covering a baby fallen from its nest
And I feel the rock move in my chest
The whoosh of wings as Hitchcock's ghosts fly away

Handfuls of cat food litter the patio now
A plastic bag with brown curly hair protruding
From holes hangs from an oak tree
I sometimes sit in the backyard straining to hear
Sounds that hint of childhood church bells
Like it was Easter Sunday

AVRIL STAPLE

Vinyl Groove

The groove we loved was etched in vinyl
Black peaks and valleys riding surf;
Pitch values folding into base beats
Vibrated the bones like ripples in lava.
From deep within the skin
The word was dance and so we did.
We danced like monkeys in a tree:
Leaves in a hurricane
Sprang off Einstein's bended space,
While all the time the doctor spins,
Playing us like puppets pulling our strings,
We danced like wild cats, raging bulls;
Pulled deeper, right down deep
Into the black vinyl groove.
All night long the beat kicked us around,
Blinded by strobes, aching with sound,
While Nietzsche and Maslow compared navels,
Fuelled on vodka surprise
Venus and Apollo adored their reflections
In one another's eyes.
Da Vinci taught Warhol how to tango.
Brahms and Liszt painted the bathroom yellow.
The whole place simmered, A pot too full,
Over heated bodies Heading for dawn,
Rolling like rhythm dough
A wrapping cocoon
Drawing us into the comfort
Of the black vinyl groove
Rocking us like babies
In the black vinyl groove
Stroking us like lovers
In the black vinyl groove.