

Koestler Awards 2007
A selection of award-winning poems

Watchful

The voice of solitary is afraid of light.
The black fog in life will never show his emotions.

He will blacken and diet the sunshine in your lives.
For he is grey and wounded.

Avoiding all eternity and wishing it was over.
No matter how dark in solitary.

He is always watchful.

John Lawrence, HMP Frankland
Koestler Outstanding Award for Poetry (£100 prize)

From the verse collection “An Evening in Edensvale”

Ishbah, in the evening of his days, sent messengers throughout the cities and provinces to proclaim a day of celebration and it was to be called The Feat of the Summer Moon and it was to be observed in perpetuity as a remembrance of the benignity of his reign. They were received with some scepticism, but in the end who was going to argue with such a lovely idea? And so it was that, to this day, the lamb is roasted with herbs and the sheaves of corn are fat and the wine is read and songs are sung without the least hint of irony.

Machir, in the winter of his reign, called for mulled wine and evergreen leaves to be deck the halls in time of snow.

From the walls she looked out upon ravens in the wind and the grey skies.

Alan Douglas-Reid, HMP Frankland
Serco First Prize for Poetry Collection (£60 prize)

Just let me know

There's no space in your questionnaire
to tell you how it felt rowing on the fjords
Where in your risk assessment
can I explain how it was to make love in Florence
When will you ask me
about the Mayor of Stockholm's speech in the Nobel Hall
Where do I tick the box
to say what it's like to run in the Troodos Mountains
Will this psychometric test show you
the guts it took to climb Ayers Rock at age five
Is this the interview
where I describe playing Frisbee for Ireland at the World Championships
Is that the report
which records the first time I saw a play at the National
Could that be the parole dossier
That outlines the weekends spent youth hostelling with my Dad

Just let me know
when you want to hear about me.

*Anon, HMP Wandsworth
Sir John Cass's Foundation Poetry Award (£25 prize)*

The deer

Sealed up in a box with a
window
Rapid glimpses of the real
world
Jolted and jiggled around
A lot like riding in the lug-
gage department of a train
Then for the briefest moment
of time
A single small brown crea-
ture.
Standing proud in the sun
Glorious in its freedom and
mobility

*Anon, HMP Dartmoor
Catherine Beavis Merit Award (£20 prize)*

Streetwise Fox

You, you fox
you sleekit bugger
no longer are you
the chicken mugger
urban streets
your hunting ground
where scraps of food
in bins abound.
Then you den
in grassy knoll
lie low and
watch the traffic flow,
eye with suspicion
the human throng
and wait patiently
for the last bird song.
Only then, when man
seeks his bed
and tucks in tight,
will you raise
your foxy nose
and steal off
into the night.

*Tony McAteer, HMP Dumfries
Merit Award (£20 prize)*

Wirral

I don't think that I ever saw so many Wagtails,
gathered together, competing with starlings
for the prize of valueless scraps.

Outside Birkenhead's market,
between cars; static and mobile;
pigeon-like suicidal. Flight only at the final second.

Owen, the warrior of the sensual,
remembered in stain glass that few ever see.
A street name, as an afterthought.

Hawthorne's impact:
a name on a gate in Rock Ferry.
Almost metaphysical.

Incestuousness keeps the clans
close, never departing the roost. Less
adventurous than Wagtail.

Shadowed by the city; sun blocked
and only once face of the town hall clock
visible across the water.

The Mersey provides etiquette for its
inhabitants to act as citizens.

*Anon, HMP Liverpool
Merit Award (£20 prize)*

I am...

I am strange and unorthodox,
I wonder about heaven,
I hear a Samurai fall through the floor,
I see death come through the door,
I want nothing,
I am strange and unorthodox.

I pretend to be happy,
I feel angry at the unicorn,
I touch hell,
I worry about the mentality of reality,
I cry at dawn,
I am strange and unorthodox.

I understand less the more I know,
I say “put up a fight you believe to be right”,
I dream of slaughter,
I try to find truth,
I hope Satan is not testing me,
I am strange and unorthodox.

*Anon, Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre
Randy Popperwell Award for Under 18-Year-Old (£25 prize)*

Noggin'

Ah were walkin' me dog when suddenly me nog start's tinglin' and me
ole' world collapsed into a lapse in time ---- no sound, jus' mime.
Air tase' like lime ...
Ah were then thrown into someplace divine wiya sandy beach and palm
trees, lovely jubbly blue seas where no bugger else has th' keys.

Wailaminate!

Whas this sudden disgrace? Im dragged back to reality it seems, as it's
half seven, time for work. T'was all a dream!

What th' bleeding' hell's goin' on ere?!

*Mitchell Wood, Llanarth Court Hospital
2nd Prize for Poetry Collection from a Special Hospital ((£40 prize)*

Lily

Like the plastic jar in my grandma's kitchen
You bear the smell of pear-drops
Reminding me of childhood memories
Preparing scones and pancakes.

Like silk to the touch
So gentle and delicate
You remind me of the winter
Crisp snow creasing under my fee.

Your leaves hold such a texture
Similar to my cat's tongue
That when I caress you softly
I get the feeling of my cat licking my hand.

Like the many fields of my hometown
Your stem stands tall and strong
Resembling the many hay bales
The straw for each field's horse

*Anon, St Catherine's Secure Centre
PEN Literary Foundation Award for Under 18s (£25 prize)*

Monkey in a Cage

The monkey shows her teeth
They think she's smiling.
The monkey coughs.
They think she's laughing.

She's fed up
But she's still standing
Waiting for happiness to come find her.
Her cage opens
But still no happiness
She's expected to find and start a new life.

Monkey in a cage
Is finally free.

Monkey in a cage
Somehow people don't realise what's wrong
Because they're too busy
With what's on the outside
But its her heart that's in a cage.

*Anon, St Catherine's Secure Unit
AD Peters Award for Poetry (£50 prize)*

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