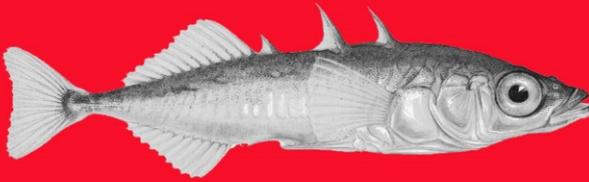




The Hedgehog Poetry Press

Stickleback



Stickleback

*Other People's Freedoms*

£2  
Where Sold

# *Stickleback*

## *Other People's Freedoms*

To commemorate the Centenary of the end of World War I

The War to End All Wars

Featuring poetry from,

1. *Carl Griffin*
2. *Chris Hemingway*
3. *Darren J Beaney*
4. *Genya Johnson*
5. *Kevan Taplin*
6. *Maggie Mackay*
7. *Mara Adamitz Scrupe*
8. *Margaret Royall*
9. *Phil Hawtin*
10. *Phil Santus*
11. *Phil Vernon*

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## LIGHT

*Chris Hemingway*

Some said no,  
while others wrestled  
with concern and compliance.

Some said no,  
while a tinder of ignorance  
launched medieval forest fires.

Some said no,  
from exile, from hiding,  
or from within.

Some said no,  
before dying,  
brutally, in proximity.

Leaving documents, memories,  
foundations for the future,  
testaments against denial.

## GHOSTS IN THE BALLROOM

*Kevan Taplin*

In a derelict chateau  
lost in rural France.  
a myriad of soldiers  
are arriving for the dance.

They trudge along the rubble-filled halls.  
Into the vast ballroom.  
Stand around the dance floor  
staring at the moon.

Eerie gossamer shadows.  
Picked out by silver light.  
Standing lost and lonely.  
Long lost the will to fight.

Shoulder now to shoulder,  
once enemies now as one  
No longer dreaded Tommy.  
No longer hated Hun.

Just tired lost souls...  
Long lost the will to fight.  
Uniforms shimmer as one  
bathed in the silver light

They trudge along the rubble-filled halls.  
Into the vast ballroom.  
Stand around the dance floor.  
staring at the moon.

Yet within the eerie silence  
which strikes a haunting tune.  
All the wall flowers of the dance  
Stand silent in the room.

But the dance floor is still empty.  
For no one would dare to dance.  
All their much-loved partners  
lie beyond the realms of France.

They trudge along the rubble filled halls.  
Into the vast ballroom.  
Stand around the dance floor.  
staring at the moon.

..Just staring at the moon.

## MONUMENTS BY NATURE REQUIRE BROODING

*Mara Adamitz Scrupe*

Today. It's surreptitious shuttle. Back & forth across  
the Mason Dixon Line. Today. It's domesticated.  
Contained. *Almost*. This voluptuous verdurous callow  
crippled country. This worst possible  
shithole you can imagine. This trailer park trash these  
fat cracker kids. Dollar Store Dollar General  
Family Dollar. *Yes*.

*Yes ma'am*. We have all the evidence you need  
to despise us. Convictions viscous as dirt  
daubers' nests - *Yes sir*. Stains  
& seeds & worn out promises.  
Pennants. Faded stars & bars. Old scars  
never wed (the lone ranger took whatever she  
could/ whatever came limping over the line  
home).

Indisputable bona fides. Hand-to-hand combat  
every every *every single day*. Appomattox never  
finished it off; monuments by nature require  
brooding. Physically consistent metaphors. Hangers-on.  
Stayers in the heat of. Daily encounters. Prodigals  
intransigent. Foxholes in plain sight. The only story  
we can ever. Reanimate with whatever

We still believe about *being*. That can't be  
diminished can't be *taken back*. Role-play. Reenact  
soldier. Householder. Even the most well-intentioned.  
Can't begin to replicate. Dress the part.  
Don the uniform. Essential kit. Both sides' lice-infested.  
Respect for the memory of. Proper exchange  
of. Casualties. Care for the wounded.

Today. We're tragi-comic spectators/ skirmish gawkers  
history's witnesses lined up watching  
behind an orange wattle plastic picket fence.

## METTLE

*Phil Vernon*

He hasn't had to go to war,  
and won't. He's lived a Golden Age,  
when young men of the village stayed  
to build, and guide the plough, uncalled;  
endowed by those who came before.

But now an ugly chorus grows  
of senators and consuls, who  
sing battle songs at heroes' tombs,  
and claim we need new heroes so  
our children know that this is Rome.

He says: each dawn still yields the sun,  
and Mars has opportunity  
enough to slake his thirst, and meet  
his other needs, without our sons;  
that wars unfought are mettle won.

## SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR

*Darren J Beaney*

The bite of the irony  
reminds the old veteran  
of the point of steel wire,  
corroded and caustic  
that cleaved a scar in  
his tender calf muscle  
on that trailing leg.  
When as a terrified young  
advancing man  
he cartwheeled over  
a war-torn fence, landing  
in a place fit for no human,  
where fear received  
violence, and  
death shouted all the shots.

He takes his vintage  
fountain pen, the source  
of so much heart felt poetry,  
presented to him by a  
weeping mother on the day  
his train left.....  
When he put Britain first.  
And in a hand that  
shakes from age,  
is shaken by memory  
and shudders to the  
thoughts of modern  
thinking on freedom.  
He pens another verse  
on conflict;

*The barbed vitriol, that marches  
at ease, in our streets,  
makes a mockery  
of wars won or lost,  
lives given and taken  
agony and suffering  
anguish and sorrow -  
allowing jack boots  
and false pride  
to campaign again through  
forgotten fields of  
remembrance  
sanctioning hate  
and intolerance  
to utter its bile, to rally  
with a voice that  
is at liberty to speak  
without paying any toll.*

## LOTTERY

*Genya Johnson*

The war left the Peninsula divided  
The North unable to leave  
The South unable to visit  
Unless a miracle happened  
And you were chosen in the lottery

After 70 years sister meets Brother  
Son meets Mother  
Other family members finally reunite  
In North Korea  
As their names are drawn out.  
In the lottery

They cry  
They embrace  
Stroke faces  
And cling to each other  
Tears spill and emotions run high  
As people see loved ones again  
After many, many years of separation

The disappointed  
May never see loved ones again  
Age is against them  
And it may be too late  
By the time their names are called out.

This is just one war  
There have been many more  
The Berlin Wall  
The great divider  
East against West

Some will never see  
Or touch loved ones again  
Some will never know  
Where loved ones died  
Mass graves still undiscovered

Maybe if the last war  
On English soil had not gone our way  
We too would be waiting to  
Hear our names called out  
In the next lottery

## THE VERDICT

*Margaret Royall*

They wake in shadow...  
For them no brightness of day,  
no lavender twilight  
Life stood still a century ago  
for those young men  
snuffed out in the stink of battle,  
buried beneath a much-vaunted  
blanket of trampled poppies

Far from home they were,  
bereft of the comforting arms  
of their loved ones,  
hostages to fate.  
Bravery and determination  
shone out in the darkness,  
beacons of hope in a world  
steeped in grey

What would they tell us now,  
those heroes?  
Was it all worthwhile,  
that ultimate sacrifice?  
Or perhaps, observing  
our "progress" a century on,  
they might deservedly  
damn us with faint praise?

## BRITAIN'S FIRST WORKING CLASS PLAYWRIGHT

*Maggie Mackay*

She wrote a revolution, did Delaney from Salford,  
wrote the art of the possible, that restless girl,  
of down to earth pain, pub banter and laughter  
in a post-war land freed up by the welfare state.  
Lone star in a male world, she wrote out taboos,  
spoke in the poor's language, of women survivors,  
of pregnancy, a gay friend, black sailor, single mother.  
She wrote all guns blazing for brickies and cabbies.

## POENA CULLEI\*

*Phil Hawtin*

'The Cat' prayed  
– cradled with a dog in a linen sack –  
in those rare  
near-silent moments  
when he heard  
wind whistle,  
wires twang,  
struts strain  
to keep wings from collapse.

He peered  
through multi-faceted goggles,  
head swivelling to check  
the hostile sky.

He begged  
for the dog to bark,  
engine to restart,  
yell of hot metal,  
fever of fuel fumes to flow back past him,  
carried by erratic chatter of pistons.

He regretted  
– as he soared silently –  
eight lives lost to exhaustion,  
delirium, disillusion.

He remembered  
as the aeroplane  
stalled,  
pirouetted,  
fell  
– broken flechette –  
onto the battlefields  
of France.

\*NB. Poena Cullei was a Roman punishment for parricide: the condemned was tied in a sack with animals, then dropped in the river to drown.

\*\*NB. WW1 aircraft engine restarting in mid-flight was ‘a dog’s bark’

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In the next lottery

## OLD FORGE

*Carl Griffin*

For the sake of a pint, this bar  
on Knoydart is as into the wild  
as I've got, driving drained hills  
of Lochaber to the Mallaig port,

jumping straight onto a Wet's  
fishing boat for the last wobbly  
leg. What if the remotest bar  
in mainland Britain was the sole

bar standing? Prohibition's refuge,  
a gasping worker's far-reaching  
salvific drop of ice-cold stress-relief,  
location so inconvenient it escapes

the ban of the Drys? What if  
the "car-park", an anchorage  
on Loch Nevis, was the last pub's  
last brewery? The smell of venison's

blood wont block out wafting  
malting grains and flavour-inducing  
hops. Wooden fermentation  
vats would line the loch, in place

of huge trees venison once  
hid behind. Now I drink my first  
beer for what feels like years.  
If this was a pub crawl I'd be

sober by the next peninsula.

## IF WE HAD LOST

*Phil Santus*

Intolerance reigns in our vassal state.  
The victors are keen to profit from strife,  
And we, the conquered, understand our fate.  
Do what you're told if you value your life.  
Minorities fear the knock at the door.  
Resistance is met with fierceness of force.  
Their methods work, and they know what they're for.  
Murder and torture are tools in the cause.  
Don't speak your thoughts or much trouble will come.  
Your life could be stalled and shattered one day,  
For betrayal would be easy for some.  
They'd gather you up and they'd take you away.  
They'd have control, and we'd know to our cost,  
This would be our story, if we had lost.

‘PIERROTS ON BRIGHTON SEAFRONT 1915’  
- WALTER SICKERT

*Phil Hawtin*

Takings are down and down for the show -  
this must be the worse gig ever.  
Perhaps it's time to ditch the 'Pierrots'.

Look at the yawning empty deckchairs  
facing us, stripes billowing mockingly.  
Surely, we're not that bad,

even if our acts are punctuated  
by random drumrolls of gunfire  
from across the Channel.

Come on you people, you need cheering up  
because the war isn't being won  
or they wouldn't need more and more men.

We could try the American minstrels again,  
but we don't like simple-minded plantation songs  
and it's a bugger to get the blacking off clothes.

Anyway we'll be glad to get rid of these stupid  
costumes - so hot in summer  
our pom-poms keep falling off.

Perhaps loveable rogue next - take the piss out  
of black marketeers Or even out of the generals -  
they're not doing too well. Come on people, laugh!

We're trying to keep the show alive, here.





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*The untitled poem*

*One picture,  
one tale,  
one tear*

*from history.*

*If it is not enough  
to convince you  
that hate and prejudice  
and bigotry are wrong*

*If the horrors of  
war, of torture  
of holocaust  
are not enough...*

*Then the best I  
can give you,  
for free,  
is my pity.*

*- Darren J Beaney*