

2008 IATE Poetry and Prose Contest
Poems of Special Merit

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Snake Skin
(after John Dickson)

The first two punks of my life,
breathing chords of God Save the Queen,
cat slinked past me towards
the swirl of people
cramming into the burnt ash tray of a
venue. I'm transfixed by their
gravity defying hair, with
neon splashes erasing all traces of
blonde and brunette.
"Martians," I think softly so they
won't hear and melt me with
charcoal-lined eyes.

Sometimes they wear black leather jackets.
Sometimes they wear only flesh.
Always, they create a harmony when they walk
of jangling chains, clinking silver studs, rustling
buckles of boots above the knees. Stinking of
smoke, beer, and something dead like an old
snake skin. Would they
burst into flames in bright
sunlight like vampires?

But inside the dark they are kings, Gods.
Whirling, raging, punching flesh and
air and bone to get a touch of something as
real as the rasp in the singer's voice
or the warrior pound of the drums.
Like some archaic dance, a
Blitzkrieg Bop, they thrash
around and through and above the waves
of living mass. Sweat pours over them;
a salty communal ocean. Lights
flash in their eyes, stream through their veins.

And in the midst of the turbulent sea
a pierced girl clutches at her own Cobain.

The metal in his lip meets her soft
forehead; he will guard her
like his precious, fragile vinyl.
We all wear down to the
same, delicate skin.