**Sestina: The Boxer** *by Alex Hancock*  
Noah returned from the corner shop with his cigars and six-pack,   
entered the bungalow, slung his damp boots by the unlit fire   
and hung up his wool coat, dripping from the stormy deluge.   
Swansea hadn't heard such thunder since the war   
when the bombs came raining down upon the docks   
and the sound went booming and echoing up the valleys.

The front door opened to the tune of rainwater pouring off the roof's valleys.   
“Come in Dai" said Noah, in the fridge shelving the six-pack.  
A man entered wearing fisherman's waterproofs fit for the docks.   
"Just got in myself" said Noah, "You look half drowned. Let's have us a fire."   
He lit the newspaper, flames surged like raging cannons at war  
With the darkness, then moved the guard to keep back the embered deluge.   
  
"This rain hasn't stopped for days, roads cut off by the deluge,   
people stuck in the villages, mudslides in the valleys"  
Dai huffed, "Seen nothing like it. Everywhere's closed. It's like we're at war"   
"It's Wales, Dai. It rains. Want a drink?” Noah broke the yoke of the six-pack,   
opened a tin and poured the cool lager down his throat, quenching its fire.   
"Heard you’d had a spot of bother" said Dai, "What’s that by there? Been to the docs?"   
  
"Bother? No, no, I'm fine" said Noah "I was walking past the docks  
last weekend, sea brimming over the wall, waves up in a deluge.   
Across the Bay Port Talbot was a carnival of fire;  
smoke from the chimneys drifting towards the valleys.   
Sunday it was, off-license still open, boys on the street with a six-pack   
enacting their brother's tales of Wind Street on a Friday night - prowling for war.

They started shouting "grandad this, drunkard that". Even mentioned the war.  
"Off you trot now, boys" I said. "I used to work the boats on the docks."   
"Now you piss yourself, you old cunt" said one. They followed me, this six-pack  
of youths up past the pub, then attacked. Blood spilled onto the pavement in a deluge,  
and flowed into the gutter like streams down the side of valleys.   
My cigar rolled into a pool of crimson and went out with a tiny flicker of fire."   
  
The hammering on the roof stopped. Noah looked out of the window at the fire  
in the sky. The firmament stretched out like a vast battlefield with The God of War   
watching over the Bay's electric-lit hills and the ripple of valleys,   
and the Channel with its twinkle of cargo ships sailing to foreign docks   
and the lamps of cars spilling off the motorway in a deluge,   
fizzing past. Noah cracked opened another tin from the six-pack.

"Towns in the valleys harden those lads; unemployment, boredom gives them fire.   
Fuelled with a six-pack and they're hungry for bloody war.   
They'll end up in the dock but might behave after my fists rained upon them in a terrible deluge."