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MICHAEL LONGLEY

THE BOXERS

We were combatants from the start. Our dad
Bought us boxing gloves when we were ten —
Champions like Euryalus, say, or Epeius
Of wooden-horse fame: ‘I am the greatest!’
‘Nobody’s going to knock me down!’ Listen,
Peter, to the commentary — gruesome teeth--
Grinding, sweat splattering their arms and legs,
Huge fists in ox--hide thongs slugging it out,
Then the knock--out blow to Euryalus’s chin —
Hoisting him with an uppercut — like a fish
That arches out of weed--tangled shallows
And collapses back into hazy water,
Sea wind sending shock--waves up the beach —
The winner gives the loser a helping hand
And his seconds support him across the ring
On dragging feet, head lolling to one side,
Blood clots et cetera et cetera...
I’ll tie your gloves. Shall we fight again?