

LITERATURE COMPETITIONS

This year we were very pleased to welcome Robat Powell as our adjudicator for the Literature competition (Adult Level). In 1985 he became the first Welsh learner to win the Chair of the National Eisteddfod for his poem *Cynefin*. He is currently Head of the Welsh Unit at the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Prose – What should the Abergavenny Eisteddfod offer? (max 1000 words)

1. Peter Jones, Tredegar (Random Bloke)
2. M Davis, Ebbw Vale (Cranogwen)
- =3. W R Newrick, Gilwern (Grumpy)
- =3. Bryn Seabourne, Abergavenny (Rick O'Shea)

Number of entries: 8

Adjudicator's comments

This competition poses a dilemma for the adjudicator. Although the intention was presumably to encourage a piece of discursive or factual writing, the entrants' response meant that creative work in the form of two short stories and a monologue has to be assessed against the discursive competitions. This is not easy and some competitors may feel that it is unfair. However there appears to be nothing in the Eisteddfod rules to prevent this.

The adjudicator has judged each entry against criteria for the particular genre adopted, rather than comparing the compositions with each other. Grumpy and Rick O'Shea are the best of the discursive entries. However, they are matched against two skilful exponents of the short story genre, and of these Random Bloke just has the edge on Cranogwen.

Poem – From where I'm standing (max 20 lines)

1. Margaret Gurney, Pontypool (Megdragon)
2. Oliver Barton, Abergavenny (Richard Davids)
3. S K Shirley, Abergavenny (Katie Simpson)

Number of entries: 35

Adjudicator's comments

The topic invites the expression of a personal point of view and the majority of the competitors certainly had something to say and knew something of the shape and requirements of a poem.

The relevance of the title was not obvious in some of the compositions, which may well have been conceived under other circumstances. Most, however, could not be considered for the premier league of this competition for one or other of several stylistic weaknesses.

Rhythm and robustness of language are essential to poetry. Maintaining those features is not easy in the blank verse adopted by the great majority, and some competitors were unable to keep their discipline throughout the composition, slipping to various degrees into the bland patterns of everyday speech: '*I can't see what's so difficult/Except that they're lazy and useless...*' or the clichéd expression of the holiday brochure: '*starry sky...hypnotic beauty...nature's evocative way...*' Some tended to overload their work by straining too hard and forcing in too many adjectives; the temptation for others was to lapse into a romantic or rhetorical sentimentality. Sometimes just the wrong word can deflate the entire effect: '*...an organic green castle...*'

However a number of entrants succeeded in avoiding these pitfalls for the greater part. Poems with a better than average touch were those by Twenty Seven, Miss Muffet, Nel, Nick O'Shea, Drusilla Black, Gerard Findlay, Samuel and Iggy.

Limerick beginning A composer of scurrilous rhyme...

1. Helen Thresher, Abergavenny (Nel)
2. Peter Jones, Tredegar (Random Bloke)
- =3. Bryn Seabourne, Abergavenny (Rick O'Shea)
- = 3. David Eyles, Abergavenny (Dai Antipodes)

Number of entries : 54

Adjudicator's comments

A stimulus which clearly struck a chord with local enthusiasts of the limerick and attracted an excellent number of competitors. The criteria for an effective limerick are well-known: a rhyming pattern a-a-b-b-a, a regular rhythm and preferably a punch in the final line. An internal rhyme b-b- between the fourth line and the middle of the final line would raise the technical standard to the deluxe level. While humour is not essential, it is the expected norm, and the overall effect of a limerick is usually best measured by the laughter levels of the audience.

Some competitors stumbled over the technical demands of the genre, but the majority cleared that hurdle with aplomb so that the overall impact of the limerick was the deciding factor. Under the influence of the rhyme, not a few of the composers ended up 'doing time' or involved in some kind of 'slime', so something more original helped to raise entries above the crowd. Some link between the final

and initial line was also able to produce a more rounded composition and differentiate between entries.

At least 30 of the limericks deserve to be read out in the Eisteddfod; those by the following competitors can be rated in the top class: Dai Antipodes, Anna Pest, Rick O'Shea, Kevin Helygen, Silly Billy, Twig, Random Bloke, Trixie Whitehouse and Nel.

Winning entries

1st prize (Nel)

A composer of scurrilous rhyme
Had written a new pantomime
Full of *double entendre*
One expects of the genre
And so blue it was named *Maritime*

2nd prize (*Random Bloke*)

A composer of scurrilous rhyme
Stripped naked one hot summertime
In Tesco's meat aisle;
He said with a smile
"How's that for a man in his prime?"

= 3rd prize (Rick O'Shea)

A composer of scurrilous rhyme
Wrote "Our Tudors are real pantomime.
Kings are mad, bad or mean,
Sad or frigid the Queen."
Headline – "Scribe blotted out in his prime."

= 3rd prize (Dai Antipodes)

A composer of scurrilous rhyme
When his readership started to climb
Escalated to porn
Which he bawled through a horn,
Adding crude scatological mime.