

## Eisteddfod y Fenni 2009

### English

#### **Limerick: ‘Disgruntled by adverse reviews ..’**

A very popular competition as attested by the 66 entries counted even though the rhyme in the in the first line is not the easiest to follow. One competitor even wrote a protest on his entry against the difficulty of the rhyme!

A successful limerick does have certain technical demands. It is important to adhere to the rhythm and rhyming pattern, or the composition will sound stilted or lame. A number of entries containing clever ideas unfortunately fell at this technical hurdle. Eleven entries were worthy of serious consideration for the top places:

*AN Other 5, Buddug 15, Crystal Jollybotttom, Voter 1, Dai Version, Lulu Beard 1 and 2, Rick O’Shea 2, Nel 2, Virginia Smedley, Mike Spilligan 2.*

For originality of approach, with questions in the first two lines to build tension, and an amusing final line with subtlety of wordplay, the winner has to be Virginia Smedley:

*Disgruntled by adverse reviews?  
Does your lady friend fail to enthuse?  
Don’t be doleful, just take a  
Blue tablet, then make her  
An offer that’s hard to refuse.*

1. Virginia Smedley
2. Mike Spilligan 2 (magician)
3. Lulu Beard 1 (banker)
3. Dai Version

#### **Poem: ‘Tell me what you hear’**

A strong competition which attracted a laudable 35 entries. The title for the composition was clearly successful and undoubtedly helped many competitors, leading them into the world of reminiscence and inner longing. The great majority of entrants have a good grasp of the nature and structure of poetry. The main factor preventing many of these from being rated more highly is a flatness of rhythm and prosaic, everyday expression. Few entrants made use of metaphor, or devices such as alliteration. Above all, poetry should evoke feelings and suggest, rather than baldly state, and the best entries all succeeded in this to some degree.

The following seven entries are placed in the top group: *Aderyn y To, Del 1, G.W.R Driver, Lord Lucan, Nel 1, Nel 2, Hafren.*

#### **Del 1**

An evocative description of the former iron works at Garndyrus. Some good use of language, with the present participles bringing the scene to life. However, the rhythm becomes rather flat at times, such as the last but one verse.

### **Nel 2 (Old woman ..)**

A dip into reminiscence with some effective use of direct and concrete language. The second verse, however, reads too much like prose.

### **G.W.R Driver**

An notable portrayal of the steam locomotive. Clever use of onomatopoeia and rhythm suggests the very movement and sounds of the train. Shades of W H Auden's 'Night Mail.'

### **Aderyn y to**

The sounds of family life in the poet's childhood are recalled and evoke past happiness. The verbs personalise the sounds of the home, but how do arpeggios 'dazzle' if the front room is 'closed away'?

### **Nel 2 (Can you hear the moon ..)**

A better poem than Nel 1 with some striking imagery, but 'noisy network' is not good. The point of the poem, particularly the final two lines, is not quite clear, but Nel has an excellent feel for poetic expression.

### **Lord Lucan**

An old crofter and old sailor, inmates of a residential home or hospital, describe their reminiscences. Lord Lucan uses vocabulary creatively in vivid description of the sounds and images of former days and shows confident control of form, although the expression becomes rather ordinary in parts, such as 'these sound and nature-proof ward windows.'

### **Hafren**

Hafren skilfully conveys a mood of desolation and loss when visiting a padlocked beach hut. The final section moves into a dreamier tone as the poet invites an absent lover to listen to the conch shell. The references here to 'Eastern seas' and 'twangling sweet airs' may be rather affected, but overall this is an expressive and extremely evocative poem.

The result:

1. Hafren
2. Lord Lucan
3. Nel (Can you hear the moon ..)

### **Short story: 'Another civil war'**

An interesting competition with several competitors rising well to the challenging task of producing a narrative, an engaging plot and some characterisation within the set limit of 1,000 words.

#### **Ben Nevis**

Tension between Gordon McKenzie and the head of the McCleods (sic), William, leads to a duel and the treacherous slaying of Gordon. The story builds tension quite effectively but the ending offers only the prospect of a civil war. The tone of the story is uncertain. The initial whisky-related humorous slant is reinforced by the ironic flavour of much of the language: '*scoundrel .. this would be their doom ..*' There is nothing humorous in the tragic ending, however, and it is questionable whether the earlier perceived irony is intentional or not. The style could be sharpened in several places by avoiding redundancies such as '*dishonest wrongdoing*' and incorrect usage of vocabulary as in '*evoked the act*' while the plural of family names does not require an apostrophe ('*McKenzie's*').

#### **Deio**

Probably a close relation to Ben Nevis, Deio relates the story of Chief Constable Charles Napier's attempt to thwart an attack on a tollgate during the time of the Rebecca Riots. Again, the author develops the tension as the police prepare their ambush for the protesters but the story leaves the reader in suspense. The narrative loses some of its clarity towards the end and the style is too flowery or even hackneyed in places, e.g. '*fearless fighters,*' '*this brave multitude.*' The '*vast bloodshed and atrocities*' reported seem rather exaggerated for the reality of the Rebecca Riots, while vocabulary is occasionally used incorrectly, e.g. people, not situations, are '*incredulous.*'

#### **Judy Auckland**

Estrangement within Jenny's family as her widowed father remarries and the step-mother, Phyllis, and her daughter bring tensions with them. After her father's death, Jenny experiences the eventual breakdown of relations between the two families. The drama tends to fade towards the denouement and the ending is a little disappointing. However, this is a story well and concisely told, compressing more than 30 years into its narrative, with a naturalness and crispness of style and some revealing glimpses of character and good description: '*Like two cats stalking their territories, they circled, caterwauling noiselessly.*'

#### **Katie Simpson**

The saga of Edgehill Residential Home for the elderly and the residents' successful campaign in opposition to the council's decision to close it. A gently uplifting story of a people's revolt with the names of characters (Charles, Oliver) and of the Home itself adding a historical irony to the title. *Katie Simpson* writes a rounded piece of work with an easy flow to her narrative, which could, however, gain from the occasional striking phrase or description.

### **Queen Bee**

A interesting description of how a colony of wasps lives and defends itself. Unfortunately, this piece hardly qualifies as a short story, lacking narrative or characterisation, although it could be converted into a narrative with a little imagination.

### **Twm Sion Cati**

A political thriller set in a future authoritarian Britain. The terse, factual prose gives the story immediacy and it ends strongly with a dramatic climax. A few more descriptive touches and a clearer glimpse into the thoughts of the main protagonist, considering his intentions, could strengthen the story still more. One stylistic point: the use of the pronoun 'he' for this nameless character makes it read as if the New Leader presses the detonator.

### **Yankee**

A tale of the cunning of two uniformed rogues at the end of the American Civil War. A well-paced narrative with some effective characterisation and dialogue, although the dialect is a little uneven, '*them rebels .. those rebels.*' The twist in the plot could be placed closer to the end to heighten its effect and avoid a slight tailing off of the drama.

Sadly, Queen Bee's description of the life of wasps cannot be classified as a short story. Ben Nevis and Deio, probably closely related, both develop their narratives purposefully, but some of their expressive style appears dated and creates a probably falsely ironic tone. The four remaining competitors all tell and structure their stories well with no little skill. Judy Auckland, Katie Simpson and Twm Sion Cati all have a claim to first place. After much deliberation, however, quality and maturity of expression are decisive for the first named, and make the final order as follows;

1. Judy Auckland
2. Katie Simpson
2. Twm Sion Cati
3. Yankee