

Poetry Festival

1979

Thank you very much for asking me to judge the written poems. I have found it very interesting and enjoyable - and very very difficult!

I have produced in each year group a 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th - and I have taken the liberty of making others as "Commended", for they featured among the final few from which I made my selection of four. I must emphasize how personal my choice is (how can anyone's choice of poems be anything else?). Someone else could well have made a different choice; I myself, presented with the same set of poems a year ago, or a year hence, might not make exactly the same selection. That said, however, I believe that selecting the best out of a collection of good poems is not a matter of whim or caprice, and in saying that choice is a personal thing I did not mean to imply that it does not rest on a defensible basis. Whoever was making the choice I should be surprised if my first choices were not included as being among the best, even though another reader might not have given them first place. This leads me to my next point, which is to say something about what I was looking for and what things attracted commendation and what did not.

A POEM MUST COMMUNICATE

The first thing is that a poem, being made of words, must have something to say, and that something must be worth saying. Dr. Johnson quoted the following as being trivial and worthless, not because the verse was bad, or the idea badly expressed, but because the thing was not worth saying:

"I put my hat upon my head
And strolled into the Strand.
There I met another man
Whose hat was in his hand"

From the point of view of merit, excellence, success (call it what you will) it does not matter whether the poem is serious or lighthearted, and by and large I judged poems by how successfully the author had achieved what he/she had set out to do. I say "by and large" because it is obvious that someone who has successfully brought off an attempt to say something very serious has achieved more than someone who has successfully produced an amusing trifle. By the same token, I did not judge any poem purely by its length. But whether a poem is long or short, serious or light-hearted, it should do something to illuminate the human condition. - I apologise for the cliché - but what I mean is that it must shed some light on, make some comment about people and the world they live in - the way they think and feel about themselves, other people, the world around them, and so on. Even a good humorous poem will do this, (e.g. The Housewife).

Next, choice of words, and especially the marrying of sound and sense; and the felicitous combination of words. There was plenty of this, even in the poems that did not get into the "top four" - a power-station "rises frowning" out of the marshy countryside; a staircase "revolving round itself"; the life of a newly convicted prisoner "lies in documents around him."

A poem must not be so mysterious, so much a private experience of the poet that it becomes obscure or unintelligible. It can (and almost certainly will) have its origin in an experience which is personal (and in that sense, private) to the poet, but the purpose of the poem is to communicate that experience and to share it with the reader. A poem about a nightmare, for example, must make it reasonably clear that this is what it is about.

VERSIFICATION

A poem is not just a collection of words, however skilfully chosen. The major difference between poetry and prose is that poetry has a discernible (usually audible) pattern. (Prose also has its word-patterns but they are much less regular and much less sustained than those of verse - indeed we think it a fault if prose lapses into actual versification). Versification can range from the simplest and most regular of rhythms (of the kind so often found in greeting cards) to something so loose and informal that it is difficult to distinguish it from prose. A poem, which has an obvious and formal pattern of rhyme and metre has a framework which is quite obvious: but "free" verse must also have various linguistic devices to hold it together - not rhyme, or a regular metre, or a particular length of line, or division into verses, but such things as repetition (or near-repetition - "echoes", if you like) of sounds, words, phrases, ideas. (D.H. Lawrence's "Snake" is a good example.) These internal links (like the metal bars incorporated into re-inforced concrete) are absolutely vital. If they are missing, what you end up with is a "poem" which does not satisfy the ear, and which may in fact be no more than an attractive piece of prose dressed up to look like a poem. You cannot treat poetry as if you are pouring blancmange into a mould - no amount of arranging it on the paper (however pretty it may look) can change it from prose to poetry. This fact led me to discard some pieces of work on which their authors had obviously spent time and trouble.

CONCLUSION

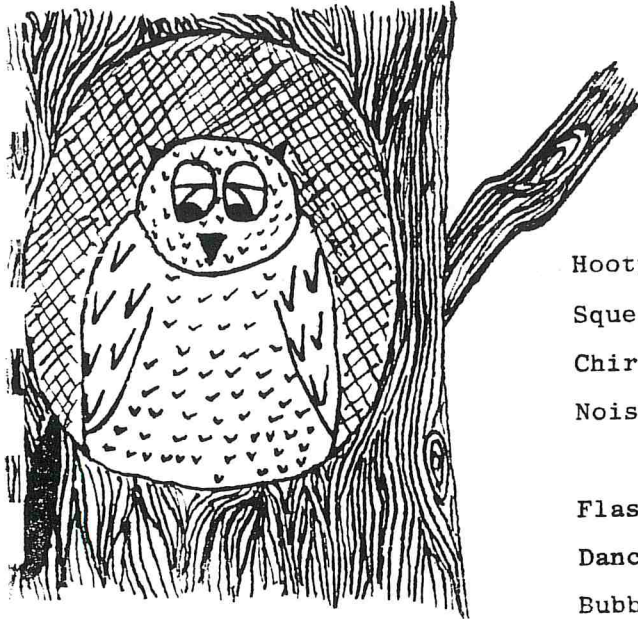
When I started to write I hadn't meant to produce even a short lecture on the writing of poetry - but I have been so impressed, and so pleased by what I have read, and by the care and thought and time and imagination put into the work that I found myself wanting to say something much more specific than just "Well done." I do say "Well done", for so many of the contributions was just that, and I have taken the liberty of using a second category of "Commended" for poems which I have not included in the top four, but which were very much in the running for inclusion. If the authors of the poems enjoyed writing them as much as I have enjoyed reading them, then the whole exercise has been very much worth while.

H.N. Winkle.

FIRST YEAR

1st: James Hoskins: "The Hunt"

A promising subject, but carrying the inevitable danger of conscious or unconscious comparison with Masefield's "Reynard the Fox". A poem on this theme needs pace and urgency, yet it must be fluent, not staccato. This means short lines of verse and much use of strong single-syllable words - and James' poems has both. The effect of speed is also helped by the change half-way through the poem to pairs of rhymes in consecutive lines - and every one single - syllables ("fur, cur, free, me etc."). "Shredded flesh" gives a vivid (if horrid) picture of the physical untidiness of a fox's death in the teeth of the pack of hounds; and the short three-syllable line that follows gives an air of finality. The idea of having the author of the poem, the fox, dead at the end of the poem is a justifiable piece of imaginative boldness.



NOISES

Hooty, fluty, fluffy owl
Squeaky, meakly, tiny mouse
Chirpy, worky stubby grouse
Noise in forest

Flashy, crashy, noisy music
Dancy, prancy, jivy bop
Bubbly, gubbly, fizzy pop
Noise in disco

Growly, scowly, prowly cats
Yappy, snappy, leany dingo
Pinky, winky, lovely flamingo
Noise in zoo

Whamy, blamy, heavy bombs
Pingy, zingy, tiny bullets
Moany, groany, spitty gullets
Noise in war

Burpy, slurpy, lumpy custard
Scrunchy, munchy, gritty carrot
Chewy, fleshy, bony parrot
Noise in dinner

Jon Clarke



3rd: Jane Whittaker: A Tabby Cat's Thoughts

Nicely put together - careful construction. I like the four first line repetitions - with-variation-of-the-last-word it could perhaps use a little more weight - perhaps come to some conclusion. It is perfectly legitimate to build a poem around a series of questions, but it does add point and substance if the writer can end with a suggested answer which is his comment on the situation. One rhyme seems to have dictated the sense - "rails" - it is not clear to the reader what rails a kitten might be expected to be balancing itself on. Still, a pleasant and agreeable poem.

Third.

The Thoughts of a Tabby Cat.

What thoughts go through a tabby cat's head
While she sits sedately on the bed ?
What's the sunniest place today ?
Where can I catch the sun's bright ray ?

What thoughts go through a tabby cat's mind,
While she's gnawing at a bacon rind ?
Was it put out for that bird
Whose twittering I have just heard ?

What thoughts go through a tabby cat's brain
While her kittens she tries to train ?
Why do they chase their tails
Instead of balancing on the rails ?

What thoughts occur in a tabby cat's dream ?
A saucer full of yellowish cream ?
She likes an occasional baby bird
That's twittering is no longer heard.

Jane Whittaker.

4th: Hazel Andrews: No title

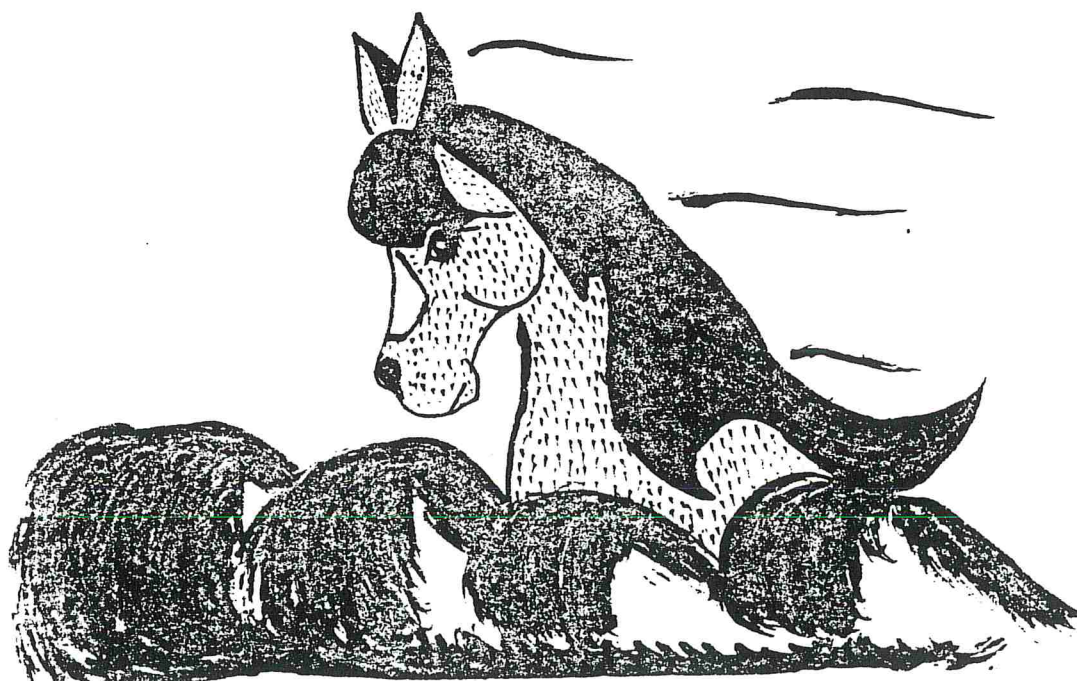
A pity not to give this a title - it gives the reader a lead in. The picture of the horse is a very agreeable one, and Hazel has a nice feeling for the sound of words, especially the effect they produce in a sequence - for example the long vowels and soft consonants of "The waves lap softly at his hooves" and (a lovely line) "Silence but for the whispering sea" (truly a lovely line!) The use of "horseshoes" in the penultimate line is risky, dangerously hard and concrete for the context, but I think she gets away with it - anyway it would be churlish to find fault with an ending so rhythmically mellifluous as "The waves melt the horseshoes.

Left in the sand"

A nice picture, and I would have given this poem a higher place if it had had just a little more to say, to communicate. Edwin Muir's poem "The Horses" comes to mind, but of course that is a very large and serious theme - but my point is that in Muir's poem the horses are there for a purpose - they are necessary to what the poet is trying to communicate. All the same, Hazel's is an enjoyable and promising poem and it is good to see someone so sensitive to the sound of words.

His neck is boldly arched,
The wind whistles past him.
The mane flowing
He trembles, excited
The waves lap softly at his hooves.
The sleek, black giant
Gives a whinny.
An answer.
Up, Up goes the giant
Hooves thrashing a welcome.
Through the sand they gallop.
Off into the distance.
Silence, but for the whispering sea.
The waves melt the horseshoes
Left in the sand.

Hazel Andrews



SECOND YEAR

1st: Jackie McClure: "Alley Cat"

Economical use of simple words to produce a quick picture of an animal which is well-known for its economical use of itself. Rhyme-scheme is a bit loose (tightening it would have given the poem a crisper "edge") but the two-word summing-up at the end of each stanza helps to focus the poem and hold it together: they are also appropriate comments on the cat's behaviour.

3rd: Andrew Bull: "Poem"

This poem deals with what on stage would be called "the alienation effect" - it is a poem about writing a poem - this poem. It is rather slight in content, but pertinent to the classroom situation of being invited to write a poem. In a sense the poem is a spoof - but the mock-solemnity of it gives it a certain appeal. The versification is very regular, whether by design or through inability to vary the rhythm at all. I don't know. The build-up to the tremendous statement by father in the last line is effectively done and the choice of the pretentious word "hour" is a good one.

FIRST YEAR

First.

The Hunt

I lie on a hillside,
Overlooking a glen,
Near a lowly hole,
That I call my den.
Now I hear horses.
And hounds loudly baying.
The horn of the huntsman
Triumphantly playing.
The hounds set off
At a lively pace
And the Hunters follow
In excited haste.
The hounds of DEATH :
Close in on me.
My brain tells my limbs
To swiftly flee.
I tear through the brambles,
And the burrs
Which catch deeply in
My sweating fur,
My pace is quick
But not quick enough
As I bound through a forest
So dense and rough.
A hound is now only inches from me
But with all my power I flee.
I'm brought to the ground.
By the largest hound
Whose teeth CRUNCH into me
But in this desperate plight
I try to fight
This snorting beast off me.
With flailing legs and flying fur
I bite into the wretched cur
But although I break free
Its the end of me
As the rest of the pack join in.
In seconds I'm dead
And the hounds are fed
From the shredded flesh
Which was me.
They've had their run,
They've had their fun,
The hunters are full of glee
As they hold up my brush,
Their faces all flushed
For it's all that remains of me.

James Hoskins.

2nd: Jon Clarke: "Noises"

Very enjoyable to see someone having such fun with words - and words nicely chosen, or even made up for the occasion - but it doesn't seem to matter, they get swept up and carried along by the sheer linguistic exuberance of their fellows (e.g. "squeaky, meakly, tiny mouse"), though I must admit that the exact significance of "gullets" rather floored me (was it dictated by the rhyme, I wonder?). I like the repetition of vowel sounds - "Hooty, fluty, fluffy owl" - and the occasional alliteration ("fluty, fluffy") which was sometimes inside the words ("scrunchy, munchy"; "flashy, crashy" etc.) I especially enjoyed "Growly, scowly, prowly cats." The short last lines of each stanza provided a necessary break from and summing-up of the previous three lines. I was a bit puzzled in the last stanza by the reference to a "Chewy, fleshy, bony parrot" in connexion with school dinner - are they so grim as this - and is the writer really suggesting we get parrot for lunch? or is the parrot enjoying (or hating!) its first school dinner?

SECOND YEAR

First

Alley Cat

Small and thin,
Sleek and black,
Softly moves the alley cat,
Cat patrolling.

Green eyes staring,
Bright and glaring,
Ready to spring on a feeding starling,
Cat anxious.

Whiskers twitching,
Back now arching,
Flutter of feathers,
Cat triumphant.

Jackie McClure

Third

POEM

I sit here wondering what to write,
A few lines for a poem;
But nothing rhymes for me tonight,
And those that do, you know 'em.

As time ticks by, I'm getting mad,
And still I think of nothing;
I know, I'll ask my mum and dad,
Perhaps they'll give me something.

We all sit quiet in our seats,
To see who has the power,
My dad stands up, and then he speaks,
"Let's write about this hour!"

A.J. Bull

2nd: Nicholas Steadman: "The Limb"

Quite a powerful and well-controlled use of words to produce a feeling of unease and indeed of menace: the device of a single adjective (different but with the same suffix) to end each of the first four lines is effective. Having used the device here, it is less effective when repeated later, even though the adjective has changed to a noun. The difficulty I found with this poem was being sure enough that I understood it enough to enjoy it. It is pretty clear that the writer is trying to communicate to the reader the experience of a nightmare (real or imagined - it doesn't matter which.) If it was a real nightmare then either he has never understood it himself, or he has failed to enable us to understand it; if an imagined nightmare, then all the more reason why he should be both willing and able to explain it to us (or at least give the reader enough clues to enable him to devise a satisfactory explanation for himself). If it is not a nightmare, then we find ourselves very unpleasantly in the world of the psychopathic killer. Or we could, of course, be on the operating table The stuff of a poem is there, and Nicholas handles words well - but the reader needs a little more help than he has been given if the communication is to be as effective as it should.

Second.

The Limb

He was strapped to the ground; expressionless.
I was paralysed with fear; motionless.
The blue heat beat upon us; relentless.
He lay quite still; defenceless.

I took up my saw.
A giant's razor.
I bent over him.
Courage.
I made the power flow.
Dread.
He smiled a smile.
Horrible.
I suddenly slashed.
Panic.
He laughed a laugh, cracked and high.
Terror.
Blood rushed in my ears, his leg was gone.
Impending death.
We rushed through space, the leg and I.
Then I knew; I would not die.

Nicholas Stedman.

4th: Stuart Dugdale: "The Toad"

A nice theme, with plenty of contrast (the ugliness of the toad offset by its usefulness and its eyes) and a touch of fairy or folk-lore in the eyes "like jewels rare." Tended to tail off a bit after the first half.

The Toad.

I am a toad, a friendly thing,
I eat your slugs and flies,
I know I'm ugly, brown and squat.
But have you seen my eyes ?
Just look at them like jewels rare,
Gleaming in my head,
I watch you with them as I sit,
Upon your garden bed.
It's time to go, along I hop.
Three hops and I am gone.
Remember me everyone
And my little song.

Stuart Dugdale.



THIRD YEAR

1st: Helen Bryant: "Mother and Child"

A brisk, no-nonsense poem showing good observation of people in a particular relationship (cf. "Jane Wakeful") There is a nice balance and inter-action between the rhythms of ordinary speech and the demands of the metrical pattern, and the rhymes (although easy) are unforced and Helen felt confident enough to be content at one point with the near-rhyme of "up" and "gulp." The language is realistic and well-imagined (overheard?) and the constant alternation between affection and exasperation is well maintained and nicely handled, and the conclusion, with affection having the last word, with the suggestion (in "God bless") that it is the dominant and the God-blessed feeling in the mother is a good one, and true to life.

THIRD YEAR

First.

Mother and Child.

Don't do that, no don't I said,
Put that down, go straight to bed.
A drink ? No, no , go up I say,
Oh alright - just lemonade.
Come on, be quick - No, no ! don't gulp,
Slow down, oh come on hurry up !
Who left that there, that Tonka toy ?
Now up those stairs, you naughty boy.
Clean your teeth, I've told you twice,
No, don't do that, it's just not nice.
Now, come on, lad, hop into bed,
Don't pull the sheets right over your head.
I must go, someone's at the door,
But if you move I'll hear for sure.

Now just be quiet, quiet do you hear ?
Goodnight, God Bless, sleep tight, my dear.

Helen Bryant.

2nd: Amanda Catt: "Fire"

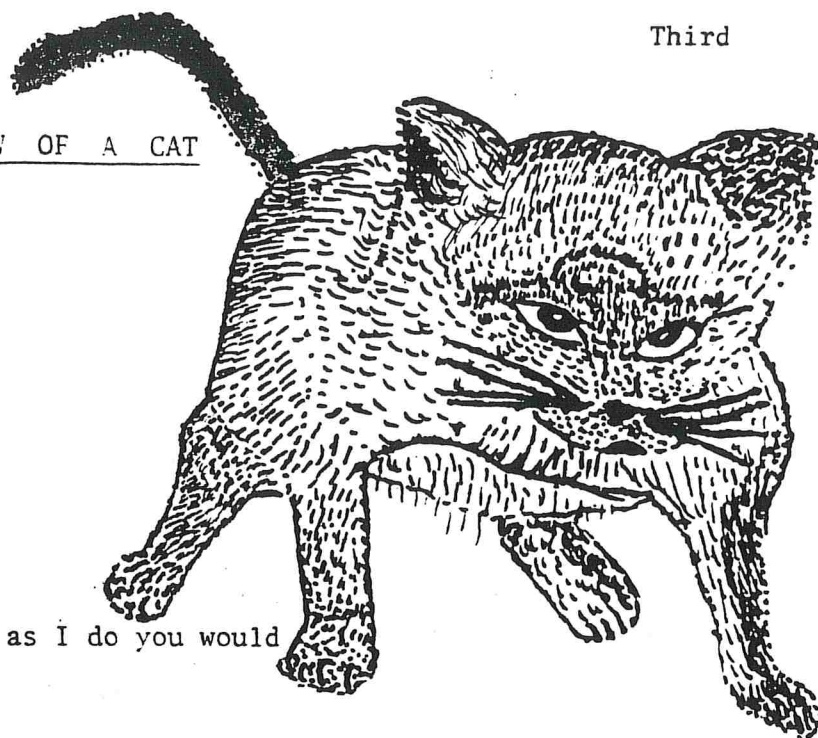
Nothing wrong with snaking the poem across the page to make a visual pattern suggesting the title (see the Mouse's tale - or tail - in Alice in Wonderland). Not an easy idea to put across successfully - always a danger in personifying something like fire, but Amanda has done it quite well. I think it succeeds because of the rhymes (which give it stability), and because of the choice of words. The fire is "creeping stealthily", then "licks the walls with fiery fingers" (can you lick with your fingers? At least it avoided the cliché "tongues of flame). Then we have the increasing liveliness and boldness, "beginning to dance" (the fire starting to enjoy itself), "reaching forward with outstretched hand." Treated in this personified way, the fire could so easily become unreal as fire, the whole thing become "precious", but Amanda has avoided this.

FIRE

Slowly she grows
 From a tiny spark,
 Flickering dimly
 In the dark,
 Creeping stealthily
 Round the room,
 Lighting up
 The silent gloom,
 Growing in strength
 She licks the walls,
 With fiery fingers
 Two feet tall,
 Beginning to dance
 She twirls herself round,
 Jumping and twisting
 In leaps and bounds,
 Reaching forward with
 Out stretched hand
 She pokes into corners
 And eats up the land,
 Her dress is ragged
 Shimmering bright
 Fiery red
 In the fierce glowing light
 Slowly she withers
 Exhausted, and then,
 Blown by the wind
 She flickers again,
 Tiptoeing softly
 She creeps away,
 Again to return
 Some other day,
 No longer she dances
 In red attire,
 For nothing remains
 Of the terrible
 FIRE.

3rd: Vanessa Bray: "View of a Cat"

Unlike "View of a Pig" this is a cat's view of itself and the world. I like the brash "Tom and Jerry", Mohammed Ali, self-confidence, "I'm clever, I'm beautiful." Very free verse, which is always risky, but more or less held together by the racy continuity of the idea and by repetition of words and ideas (more in the first half than the second). All the same, heading for that dangerous dividing line between verse and prose. Nevertheless, likeable, lively, and entertaining - and it does have something to say about the nature of cats.

THE VIEW OF A CAT

Listen you humans over there,

This is my bed,

This is my bowl

You do as you please

I do as I please

Sure I'm proud.

I'm clever

I'm beautiful.

If you cleaned yourself as well as I do you would
be beautiful too.

Why do you worry when I go out?

I don't care where you go or what you do there.

So why don't you stop fussing?

Why do you worry if I'm meeting some lady cat

I don't bother when you meet that Mr. Jones
from No. 59.

And when I come home from a fight battered and worn.

You fuss and pet and cover me in sympathy.

But you didn't see what I did to the other cat.

I purr and rub up to you at dinner time,

You think I'm being loving and affectionate.

But all I want is that plate of fish on the top.

And when your posh friends come round and marvel at me

Then I go out and drag in some half eaten bird or some
earthworms,

They don't like me so much then do they?

You think I'm cruel but no! I'm just plain clever.

I bet you couldn't stalk quietly up to some unsuspecting
starling and catch him.

I can.

And when I come home with a dead mouse and begin
flinging it by the tail round the room,
you take it off me.

Why?

It's not being cruel. I'm just being myself.

I like it. I am a cat.

4th: Richard Franklin: "My First Canoe Race"

Short, but has life and pace: is pushed briskly along by the repetitions - "faster, faster, faster" neatly picked up again (after being avoided or very modified in the middle stanza) in the final stanza with, "closer, closer, closer,". Good, concrete visual imagination, "an island clothed in grain" and rapids that are (partly because they are seen as a hazard, with "hard" meaning "difficult", and partly because Richard can "see" the rocks that underlie the water in the rapids.) Impressions are rapid, fleeting, which adds to the sense of speed, "people shouting waving". In view of the rather formal metrical pattern a tighter hold on rhymes (or near-rhymes) would have given the poem that little extra edge and tautness. Still, a lively, fast-moving piece.

Fourth.

My First Canoe Race.

Water rushing, rushing, rushing.
Past an island clothed in green.
Going faster, faster, faster,
To the rapids hard and grey.

Paddling one side then the other,
In and out of jagged rocks.
To the right, no to the left.
Dodging, dodging through the spray.

There's the finish people cheering,
Getting closer, closer, closer.
Past the people shouting waving,
Feels so nice to be a winner.

Richard Franklin.

FOURTH YEAR

Undoubtedly the "best value for money".

1st: Julie Crew: "Through the Eyes of a Mirror"

Almost a metaphysical poem An interesting idea which could so easily have been turned into something trivial but wasn't. The idea of the mirror as a wise, omniscient and compassionate counsellor is an appealing one. It is a very adult theme too for a 15 year old. Free verse (with all the hazards) but Julie has managed it reasonably well. I like the distinction between "don't glance" and "just look"; I like "shaded by the dark", with its suggestion both of darkness and of concealment; I like, "all anguish falls apart". I'm not so happy about what I take to be the deliberate decision in the last few lines to come very near to a regular metre and near-rhyme, with "high" and "pride". Perhaps I am objecting to the ending being a bit "easy" - "never mind, it's all going to be all right". But when all is said and done, it remains a good attempt, sustained for quite a long poem, at a difficult and challenging theme, and with a substantial measure of success.

FOURTH YEARTHROUGH THE EYES OF A MIRROR

As you walk by,
Don't be afraid of Me,
Stop, don't glance,
Just look at what you see.
No sun on this horizon,
A picture in black and white,
Fraying at the edges, wrinkled,
Pale, with no fire set alight.
I've watched you growing up,
Then growing old and grey,
I know what's been wrong
As you've glanced at your reflection, each day.
You see a shadow of a girl,
Who passes wistfully by,
All without meaning now,
But stop, don't cry.
The trees have stopped rustling,
Can no more jokes make you laugh,
Wait! Don't run away.
Forlorn, and shaded by the dark,
Forget your endless memories,
Start to live again,
You know I don't forget you
As you've lived through desperate pain.
The sunlight creeps through the open door,
And all anguish falls apart,
A new beauty has behelded you,
Keep it clinging in your heart.
At last you'll be happy,
So hold your head up high,
Just remember what I've told you,
Then walk away with pride.

Julie Crew

2nd: Michael Smith: "Television"

A popular theme treated crisply and concisely, with no words wasted. Very much the "verbal impressionist" style - but none the worse for that. Everything depends on keeping the crisp, staccato pattern going, without letting the two words of the short lines be dictated by the need for rhyme. They haven't been. They rhyme, yes, but one has no feeling that the rhyme has dictated the choice of words, which are very much what the sense requires. I like the presentation of both points of view, and it was sensible to start with the conventionally popular one. It was also a good idea to separate the final comment (almost like the two-line summing up at the end of a Shakespearean sonnet) not only visually, on the paper, but by a different metrical and rhyme pattern - and with such strong rhyme-patterns all through, he can carry off the final non-rhyming line.

Second.

T.V. Set.

One eyed monster,
Home invader,
Intellect numbing
senses raider.
Concersation killing
Rubbish trader,
A curse of life today.

News providing
Conscience worker,
Company giving
Loneliness breaker.
Entertaining
Laughter maker,
A joy of life today.

To some a curse, to some a joy,
Some it will please and some annoy,
Each coin has two sides.

Michael Smith.

3rd: Jeremy Cronin: "Depression"

I like the sharpness of this poem. In the first stanza Jeremy has caught something of the brittleness of the neurotic. I like too the change of "texture" in the second stanza with its very attractive, rather wistful opening line "And hearts of gold can turn to grey". I suspect that from "Hey this looks the place" Jeremy was finding it more difficult to keep it up, for in the final stanza the rhyme scheme has disintegrated (or been deliberately abandoned). This may well have been done to suggest the increasing disintegration and disorientation of the "depressive" patient - but I am not sure that disrupting a firmly established rhyme-scheme is the right solution.

DEPRESSION

Can't stop,
and face the facts,
I'm highly strung and I can't relax.
Tune me down 'cos I'm feeling sharp,
My bloods too weak and it strains my heart.

And hearts of gold can turn to grey,
and wills of iron can melt away.
Hey this looks the place,
Where we can get a new face.

Can't stop,
Oh doctor please,
I bruise so easy and cut so clean,
Cure me quickly, bring me to my knees,
Knock me out, come on I wanna sleep.

Jeremy Cronin

4th: Peter Andrews: "Our dying World"

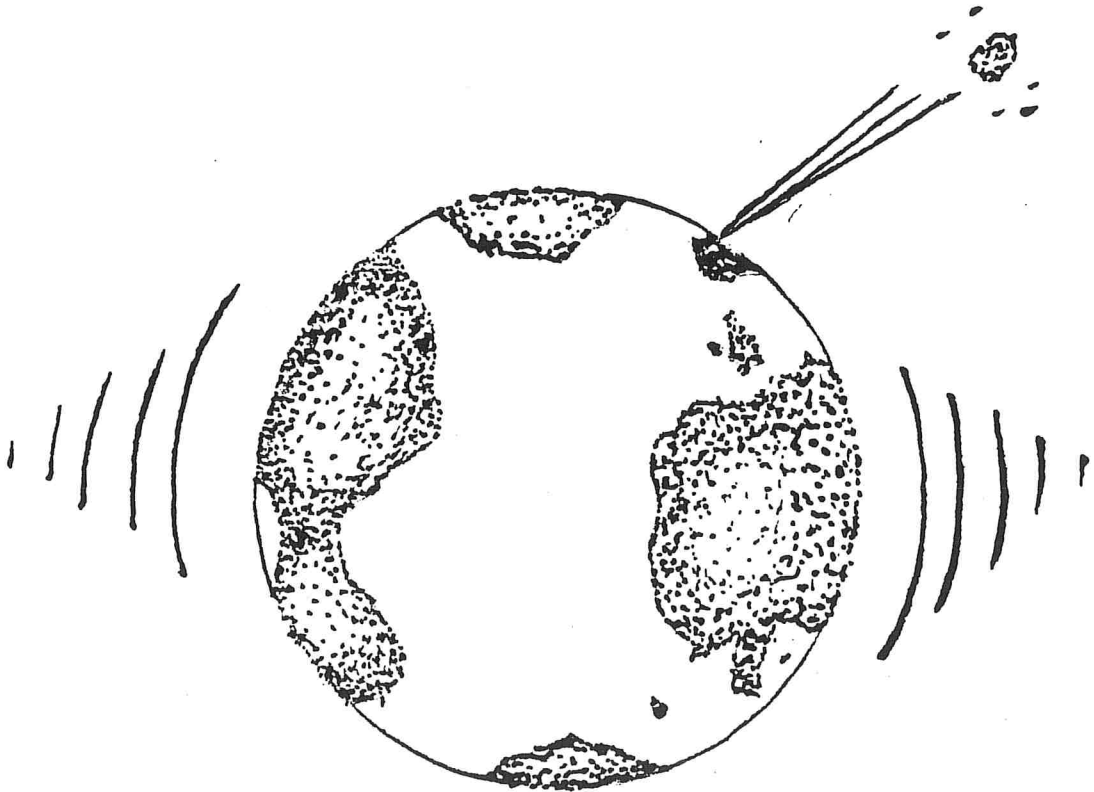
A simple, single, large and common theme, in simple and straightforward language - the whole poem is almost so simple that it doesn't make the impact it should. Nevertheless, the metre is well-handled, with enough variation of rhythm to keep it out of the "doggerel" class. I liked the simple concreteness of "The wood will rot and the metal rust." and "our glowing cinder will float in space." The author has worked well within his own limitations. This is sensible, but I found myself wishing he had stretched himself and his idea, a bit further - made rather more of such a momentous idea. Still, a good attempt.

Fourth.

Our Dying World.

This mass-produced world about me stands.
Our great empires crumbling back to sand.
The wood will rot and the metal rust,
As this prefab world turns back to dust,
And who will care when its all gone ?,
What will care for the home of the bomb ?
Our glowing cinder will float in space,
A radioactive memorial for the human race.

Peter Andrews.



FIFTH YEAR 1st. Mark Williams. "The Intruder"

A nice light touch, which both metre and rhyme help to maintain. I liked the word "flounces" for the butterfly - it suggests the "flounce" of a piece of material on a woman's dress, it suggests a particular kind of movement; and it also suggests removing oneself from an unwelcome situation in a fit of pique or as a protest at an unacceptable situation. A good last line, with no change of metre but a solid heaviness in "clumping", the long deep vowel-sounds of "two-boots" and the picking up of the "p" in "clumping" by the "p" of "pry".

FIFTH YEAR

First.

November Night.

Listen
With faint dry sound,
Like steps of passing ghosts,
The leaves, frost crisped,
Break from the trees
And fall.

The Intruder.

Two boots in the forest walk,
Pushing through the bracken stalks.

Vanishing like a wisp of smoke,
Nimble tail flies up the oak.

Rabbit, helter skelter shoots,
Fast to his house among the roots.

At work upon the highest bark,
Tapperbill knocks off to hark.

Butterfly, through sun and shade,
Flounces off along the glade.

Not a creature lingers by,
When clumping two-boots comes to play.

Mark Williams.

2nd: David Williams "Paper Round"

Simple and straight-forward idea matched by simple, straight-forward form and language. Comes a bit near to having too little to hold it together (no rhymes, no fixed metrical pattern) but just manages it mainly through the short second line in each stanza which is also a comment on the situation. Some nice choice of words - "brandishing blinding headlamps" and "yesterday's muscles ache", and "speechless houses". Alliteration also helped to hold the poem together.

PAPER ROUND

The alarm signals half past six,
Out of bed,
To face the bitter winter air,
With obvious reluctance.

Out into the dark,
Silence,
Bar the occasional vehicle,
Brandishing blinding headlamps.

My bike and I,
Alone,
Battling against the powerful wind,
Yesterday's muscles ache.

Collect the papers,
Front pages,
With the same, dour interpretations,
Portraying identical matters.

From the first drive,
To the last,
Identical letterboxes,
In the same speechless houses.

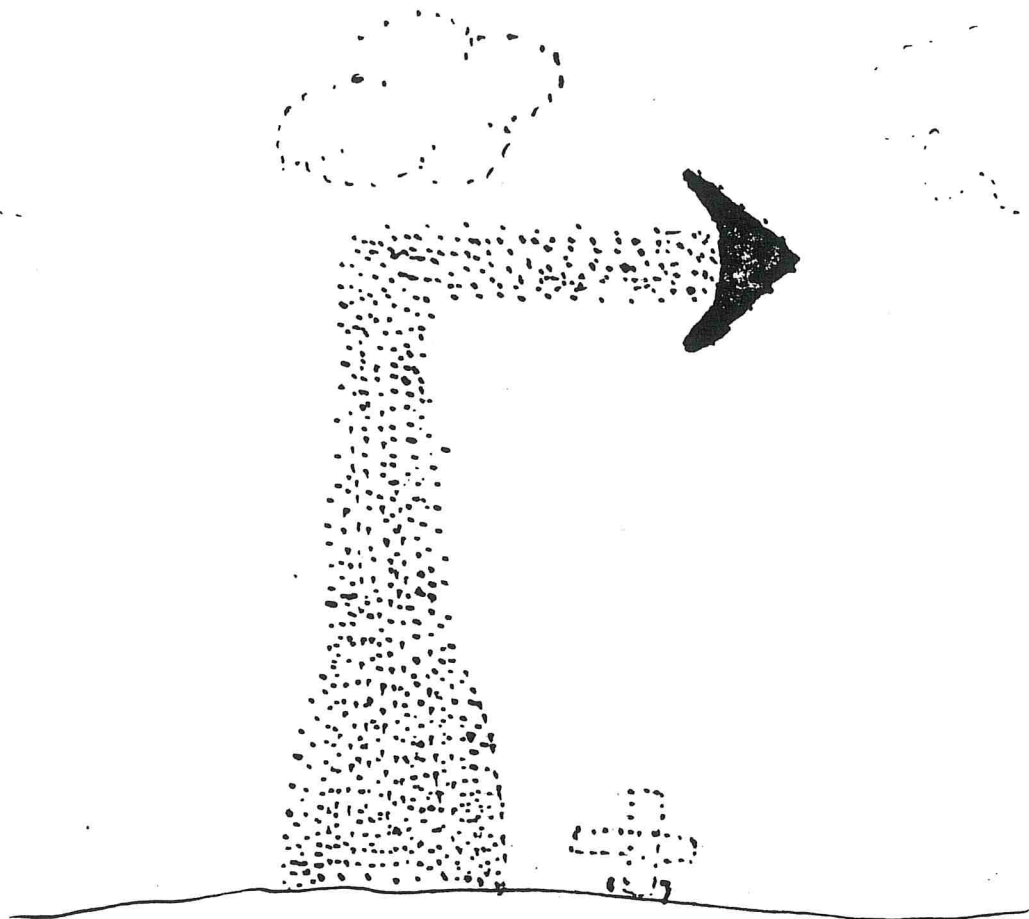
Conclusion of the round,
Devoid of mistakes,
An air of satisfaction remains,
Until the next day and the next.

David Williams

3rd: Susan Mitchell "The Turning Point"

Neat, concise, with a clear message. The duality of meaning is well expressed in the opening two words "Twisting, turning" and in the next word "schooled". The whole poem has a pleasing economy of words. The philosophical, metaphysical point is well made. Technically, the poem is a little bit lacking in devices to hold it together and give it the technical unity that it could do with. Oddly enough this lack doesn't prevent its being an effective poem, probably because Susan has kept a tight control on length of lines, on words, and on syntax. I liked it.

Third.



THE TURNING POINT

Twisting, turning,
Schooled to reach the sky.
The trunk, definite, precise.
No need for hesitation,
Why should there be ?
Suddenly, free,
At the crossroads of life.
Which way now ?
This way, that way.
Branches form.

4th: Julie Bullock "The Wings of Change"

I like the reconciling of apparent contradictions, "No one does, Yet so many do"; "Cold and stark, Yet warm and full". The idea is good, though I'm not sure that the reader has an adequate explanation of how the contradictions are reconciled. "The mortar of love" holding together "the bricks of happiness" is perhaps getting bit close to sentimentality, - but it is a perfectly valid piece of symbolism. The "yellowed paper" flapping "viciously" in order to take revenge on the city I found less satisfactory. (Wallpaper or newspaper ?) How does it get its revenge on the city by flapping viciously ? How has the city wronged it, that any revenge should be called for ? These are questions which must flit through the reader's mind.

The versification is a bit undecided, varying between the very concise line "No one does", to something much longer and looser. There is no rhyme-scheme, and not a lot to hold the poem together internally. Nevertheless, an interesting poem, with some nice touches and a worthwhile theme.

The Wings of Change

Only the cat remains now,
But he doesn't belong,
No one does,
Yet so many do.

An empty house in an empty road,
Cold and stark,
Yet warm and full,
Full of laughter and life,

The mortar of love holds so tightly the
Brides of happiness,
That no machine can destroy,
No lever can remove.

Windows smashed and cracked,
Those deep, dark gulleys,
Gouged into so many lives.

A yellowed paper flaps viciously,
Taking revenge on the city.

Alone, time flies, the wings of
Change flashing dark against the
Sky.

Julie Bullock

