

SOME LISTOWEL CITATIONS

(For the Open Poetry Competition, all entries are judged blind).

First place goes to a long poem with 15 sections entitled “Exit” (poem 16). It is a poem about a father’s death and it is strong, detailed, and emotionally honest all through. Here is a poet who has learned his trade and whose humanity is at all times delicate and deep. This theme has been treated almost *ad nauseam* in Irish Writing but the poet of “Exit” has brought a freshness and a passion to his treatment of the theme that help to make the poem worthy of the most concentrated attention . . . as a total achievement the poem is . . . an admirable performance . . .

Adjudicator Brendan Kennelly

“I am not a bit surprised to see you featuring in the honours list. Your long poem ‘A Week in the Life of Ray Daly, Laboratory Technician’ [re-titled after *The Burren Days*], was to quote the adjudicator [Brendan Kennelly], ‘At once a love poem, a criticism of modern life, a portrait of an intelligent individual in an increasingly soulless and shallow world, a critical picture of the ways in which our landscapes, lakes and rivers are being increasingly threatened from various forms of pollution’ ”.

from Maurice Lonergan, Literary Competitions Secretary 1981

. . . **Decisions** [poem 159] shows an unusual ability to link mythology with history, the past with the present, the solitary mind with collective problems, warfare with peace, culture with murder, the individual with society, religion with destruction. The central persona of the poem is really a series of identities sliding into each other, constantly forced into decision-making, always perceptive, thoughtful and articulate, gradually becoming a kind of composite identity, a single voice created out of many voices. With force and eloquence, a fascinating picture of history is built up. The reader begins to sense the panoramic character of the poem. When he reflects on this fact, the poem acquires new depths. This is so, I believe, because the work itself is intensely reflective. It may also be said of it that it has genuine epic qualities. It is both expansive and concentrated. It takes on, and copes with large themes. It achieves at times a kind of cosmic eloquence . . .

Adjudicator Brendan Kennelly 1985

The clear winner is entry 120 – a long poem entitled Pale Venus [re-titled after “Fair City”].

This work is a remarkable achievement. It employs the figure from the Dublin song “Molly Malone” to produce a compelling, richly detailed portrait of eighteenth-century Dublin and a bitter satiric attack on twentieth-century urban development. As in all good poetry the language is surprising, strange and yet wholly appropriate. This work with its bold rhymes, half-rhymes and marvellously controlled consonantal music is a tour de force. It creates a world of its own, celebrating a city, the sea and the produce which sustained its oppressed but courageous inhabitants.

I believe Pale Venus would make a marvellous radio feature – with suitable music (the Messiah is alluded to in one section) it could achieve a great popular success.

Adjudicator Terence Brown

Arboretum

“There is a bower-like, sheltering quality to this meditation in a public garden where the poet strolls with his wife and son . . . Ennis uses the names and origins of plants in litanies of abundance . . . This rich, reflective poem will pollinate the reader anywhere.”

Rory Brennan, *Books Ireland*