

the
maurice botten
school

poetry
festival
1987

What does an adjudicator look for in a poem?

Judges don't read through poetry with a check-list of desirable features by their side; they will usually read patiently and wait for the odd poem to leap up and hit them between the eyes. But how can a poet make sure the poem does that?

Here are some possible ways. The poet can try to:

see familiar things in new ways.

make the language of the poem appropriate to its meaning and subject.

Write honestly.

I enjoyed the 'What is....' poems because they did look at familiar things from unusual angles. I enjoyed poems such as 'Fitness Mad' and 'Checkmate' because of the skill with which they were made. I think, though, that the most important of the things I mentioned is honesty. Writers need to write about what concerns them and what they have experienced, in their own language, not someone else's! When I read a poem, I want to find out something about the poet and poems like 'Surface Dive' helped me do that.

Judging these poems was a difficult but enjoyable task. If your poem was not among the winners, you might find the points I made above helpful for next time.

David Orme

FITNESS RAP!

I'm a real cool cat
I'm fit not fat
I'm a real cool dood
I eat the right food
I don't eat grease
I put it on my hair
'Cause if you are fat
Then you are square

Choose the right diet
And boast to your friends
That you are healthy
And you've got sense
Get rid of beefburgers, hamburgers
And all the chips
'Cause all they'll ever do
Is make you feel sick.

I'm the latest
I'm the greatest
I'm a real slick rick
To survive in this world
You gotta be quick
I've got an exercise room
'Cause I'm a fitness freak
I go out joggin' every day of the week.

I don't do drugs
Or smoke at all
The words 'pacesetters don't smoke'
Are up on my wall.
Heroin, and Canibis, and stuff like that
Will kill you in the end
And that's a fact.

So be fit
That's real cool.
Be fit don't be a fool
Don't slob
Don't be a bum
'Cause bein' fit
Can also be fun.

Luke Trowsdale
Craig Bonner

2F

What is Age?

What is age?
Age is cobwebs stretched across a tree.
What are cobwebs?
Cobwebs are shields of lace.
What are shields of lace?
Shields of lace is the splintered moon.
What is the splintered moon?
The splintered moon is a dish of cherry blossom.
What is cherry blossom?
Cherry blossom is a cauliflower.
What is a cauliflower?
A cauliflower is a white shadow on the ground.
What is a shadow?
A shadow is an image of tomorrow's world.
What is tomorrow's world?
Tomorrow's world is age.
What is age?

Catherine Head 20

The Doll

The cardboard box is her home,
Newspaper her bedding
Where she had lain
Asleep for years
While the one that loved her once
Grows up
And forgets
Her childhood memories.

Now, your once smooth, clean, pretty face
Is sullied with age and wear.
Someone loved you once,
Didn't they?
You sat on a pretty cushion
While small hands
Brushed your
Golden hair.

You were the foundation of her play,
The architect of her happiness.
And heartless!
Oh, cruel!
She has left you
Alone,
The one who forgets the happiness
You brought her.
Now you are waiting
For another
To love you
As she did.
This time, one who never forgets.

Emma Chambers 20

NEPTUNE

Neptune stands with hair of gold,
Way below the ocean deep,
Up above, the moon shines cold,
Far away the salmon leap.

Flowing beard and tousled hair,
Worn by rock and sea and sand,
Only seaweed does he wear,
Stoney eyed, and fork in hand.

Silently the King awaits,
As creatures pass his stately form,
Fleeing through the seaweed gates,
In the calm before the storm.

Empty, cold and darkness filled,
A deep, black cave is Neptune's home,
Swirling sand the water stilled,
Now is changed to tumbling foam.

Kay Small 2T

HEROIN

Spinning and Whirling,
As she dances the Devil's dance.
The folds of her dress flowing,
Her bare feet hardly dust the ground.
The music fills your ears,
And you let it,
Because you feel down;
Life is not what you could wish for.
You turn to her.
Her arched swan neck
Bridges her delicate figure
To her snowy-skinned face.
Her glossy red lips ooze with laughter,
And her sleek, dark hair
Hides her eyes.
They have said she is possessive.
And dangerous.
That you would be playing with fire.
But you turn a blind eye to these warnings.
She is so attractive.
And she would not harm you.
So you let her strong, deep current
Pull you in.
And you dance with her.
She lets you live a holiday of parties,
And helps you to forget
How life has let you down.
And when you come home crazy,
She nurtures you to her bosom,
Where you feel you are safe
To block out the World.

continued...

And when your sorrows are drowned,
She puts you down at her side,
And hovers expectantly.
But when you turn to walk without her,
You cannot.
Because she has filled your mind and body
With her body.

 You feel alone,
And run to her like a frightened child,
Flinging your arms around her neck,
Depending upon her to hold you.
But she does not like being taken for granted.
She refuses to support you now.
And breaks with the strain,
Falls to the ground,
Her thin white bones snap and splinter,
And you feel helpless.
But she drags a laugh from her throat
That freezes your back-bone,
And for the first time,
You see her eyes;
The centres gleam dull,
Like black coal
In a pit of bloodshot froth.
They always say,
"Love is Blind",
But now,
You see that she is deception.
Her face,
White and thick with powder,
A facade of youth.
Her cheeks hang thin,
Her lips are taught,
And her swan's neck
Dies into a broken, bony body.
The dress spills,
Blood red,
And she sinks to the floor,
Clawing out at you
With clutching talons.
You turn to run in hysterical fear,
Away from her dying carcass.
But you find that you are dying,
Weaker and slower.
And she is rising like a vampire
On you.
She kicks you in the face,
And then gives you the push
Over Death's threshold.

'Checkmate'

The black king to move,
Hemmed in by the pieces.
Blake's eyes were anxious,
Porter's defeatest.
Porter swooped down his queen
To block off the attack.
Blake breathed relief -
He could counter that.
In came a knight;
To carry off the queen
Porter's face tensed -
His eyes became mean.
He slid down a rook
And crushed a white pawn!
He hit a few pieces
Blake watched with scorn
He upset the table
And stamped on the cat
Blake (as a fully paid up member of the
Cat's Federation League) could not stand that!
Blake stood ten feet tall
(Not including his wig)
He stood hands on hips
Firm as an oil rig.
He gave one icy stare,
Followed by fire.
As he shot the game's pieces
To Porter, the liar.
"You scheming old man!"
"You plotter! You cheat!"
Hands punched the air
Feet trod on feet
A ship in a bottle,
Snatched from a shelf,
Was used for a missile
Thrown with some stealth.
Both black and blue
They collapsed on the floor.
Porter's wrist sprained
Blake's eye was sore.
They groaned and they grumbled
But not at each other
They grumbled and groaned
And asked for their mothers.
Brought down from splendour
The game they now hate
It conquered them both
I think it's Checkmate.

A Village

Sharp eyed women,
Thatch, infested with weeds,
Gossip; of young girls in trouble,
Whispers turn into accusations.
Chimney smoke spreads the word,
Children can't wait to get out of their fore-fathers' home,
Faces turn; a flash car dives through,
A cowparsley bobs,
Blue-tits fly,
The village begins again.

Simon Tuffin 3J

Alcatraz Illuminations

The iron bed moans.
It scrapes the chilly wall
Where he lies,
Staring into the sombre darkness.
Light comes through the dusty window
But in bars -
To remind him eternally.
Coldness comes over.
The chalky tap drips,
His lips shiver.
A clash of blinding yellow
Then slamming of metal doors.
The building's power switch is on
The prison walls look unfamiliar,
Perhaps a friendlier place.
To spend a lifetime inside.

Lisa Kelly 3J

BEDROOM LIGHTS

Sitting at the desk
doing homework,
I gaze at the window.
A hovering dome of light
hangs outside
the pane,
a transparent mirror,
Its polished gloss
casting smooth shadows
across my face's glassy reflection.
The electric lamp tries my eyes.
My thoughts whirl.
The hour is late.
I blink, close, open and close again.
Yellow and orange flowery glows
bounce, glimmering through my mind.

Then in bed,
I like to lie,
my head on one side,
staring at the tiny gap
beneath the door.
Someone flicks the switch.
Like a trapped fire,
a burning slit of light
appears instantly at the carpet's edge.
A white-hot rod.
It disappears,
and a door shuts.

I awaken.
A radiant shine fills the room,
dazzling brilliance.
But going to turn it off,
I find the sun's vividness
streaking a blinding ray of flare.

Michael Reeves 3Q

After the War

The whispering wind,
Blew through the transformed terrain.
The corn a lease of life,
In a place where so many have died.
Ditches of bad memories scattered around.
The yellow ears a plain blanket.
But through the sheet,
and through the nightmare,
There came red happiness.
A beautiful thing if ever there was.
Red fingers of life.
The poppies stood tall
As they stood tall through the war.

Edward Goodwin 3J

The Melodious Resurrection

A gloomy velvet lined coffin
reveals a disfigured form.
Its shameful backbone
Supports a hollow rib cage.
Four disintegrating veins
are tied across its body,
tightened by haggard fingers.
Grey hairs are strung
across an old walking stick.

A young being disturbs the mortal remains.
With the walking stick in one hand,
and the body in the other,
her hand rocks to and fro.
The corpse lets out a trembling song,
Filled with tenderness and emotion.
Its once vacant body
Fills with a loving heart.

But it is again an unfeeling skeleton
that is placed in its velvet bed.
With only a broken string
to testify its former glory.

Sarah Horn 4Q

Surface Dive

I plunge my head beneath the surface of the water
The sea changes hue,
From ultramarine to colourless,
Bordered by a thick weaving weed

I wait, the big fish over the little fish,
My breathing sounding deep and hollow in my ears.
All around, the deep sea, and silence.

A fish darts from outside my rubber-bounded field of vision,
And hovers, a miniature helicopter in shades of blue,
I break, and propel downwards,
My mouth contorted by the pressure on the snorkel.

There is a swirl of mud from somewhere under the weed,
My head closes on itself,
I rise to the surface, and gasp quickly for native air.

The weed drapes itself supernaturally about my white legs,
As I float on effortlessly over an underwater cliff,
The land falling away sheerly below me.

There are only two things which can terrify me here
The slow return to the surface, devoid of air,
And the meeting, around a smooth rock
Of a huge and terrifying creature from the deep.

Jon Hallé 4G

Leaving

Posters of pop stars lie folded neatly.
A once cluttered dressing table is arranged tidily.
Air previously heady with hair spray smells fresh.
A floor strewn with clothes, now clean.
An era so happy is finished.
A promising future lies ahead.
The silent tears of a mother, fall
In a room unusually quiet.
A suitcase stands in the corner,
Enclosing a life of hope.
The radiant daughter appears on the stairs,
The time for her wedding has come.

Karen Painter 4J

Buying A House

I'll have that,
Yeh, that one,
The one that stands proud.
Yeh, that's the one for me.

The door is solid,
Yeh good 'n' firm,
And it's got heating.
Yeh this is the one for me.

But has it insurance
A guarantee?
Oh,
It could be the one for me.

And will it stand up,
To all the weather?
Oh,
It might be the one for me.

And does it need repairing,
Some patching up,
Oh,
It just might be the one for me.

Oh Yeh, what's the price,
Or near offer?
Ah!
This ain't the one for me!



Phillip Rawlings 4Q

Rockabilly Revival

He preens himself in the mirror,
His quiff faultlessly greased,
Outside, his Cadillac proudly stands,
A chrome ferocious beast.

His bootlace tie looks really cool,
His drainpipe jeans look nifty,
But this is 1987,
And not the nineteen fifties.

The wind tugs and pulls at his stiffly set hair,
Though at forty two there's not much,
And with his car radio blasting he lets the world hear,
Buddy Holly, Little Richard and such.

He saunters away from the car park,
Walking tall in his blue suede shoes,
And although people point and make funny remarks,
He walks proudly singing the blues.

David Billing 5Q

Successful Catch

Soft ripples across the water,
Born free am I now.
Rocked gently upon the ocean,
Resting like a baby.

A sharp tug of my line,
Shallow, easy strain on the head.
The spool unwinds like a tense winch,
Giving line to the creature below.

The barbed iron hook,
Baited for the unsuspecting predator.
Another sharp tug,
Slowly its gullet has been arrested by the hard
destructive metal.

The line now leaving,
as if it were late for work.
Now I strike,
A shark shadow-like head rises from the green murky water.

Into the dingy,
faster now.
I pull hard but easy,
A damp, bloody hook appears.
Dead now the fish,
Gills hard and strong.

Steven Edwards 5G

The Trials

I was at Lymington.
For my first real break.
It was a trials' week.
If only I could make
The Saints' Junior Team.

We were on the pitch.
I had stomach cramp.
My first touches were poor.
I could feel the damp
Of sweat on my shirt.

Co-ordination was gone.
I felt very small.
But in the second half,
I received the ball
Right at my feet.

I danced down the wing
Dodging every attack.
I was inside the area.
With a hefty smack
I scored a goal!

Like a roller coaster,
I soared with delight.
My play had improved.
It was sharp and tight.
Would I be chosen?

The interview was outside
On a rough wooden seat.
The trainer said,
"Boy, you've nimble feet.
We'll sign you on,

For Schoolboy Training."
I was taken aback
I dropped like a plant,
Suffering a lack
Of water and light.

"What d'you say boy?
Aren't you pleased?"
I just smiled weakly.
"Come on," he teased.
"Don't you want the place?"

"Oh yes," I stammered.
"I certainly do!"
And so it was settled.
I was finally through.
I'd done it! I'd won!

This Sculptured Land

The wind is strong against my face.
Barren hills stretch, rolling forever.
Wind whistles discordantly through my hair.
It smells fresh, cold and vigorous.

Hills roll in waves long and endless.
Shadows mimic the stretching clouds
Across the vast hill tops.
Dykes vein into the centre of the hull-like valley.

The windswept carpet of grass
Is pierced by morbid, splintered rocks
Like spies that don't belong
Torn by folded land
In scored piercing lines.

But time shall pass forever here
Rolling like the wavey endless hills
And time shall pass and time shall pass
And the hills could last forever.

As this is where the world began
Where god laid out his sculpturing hand
But when time passes
All this could end
It would only be the ignorance of man
The would smash and break
This sculptured land.

Matthew Grace 5J

THE LIE

She sat, wretched on the bed,
The windows showed her the world outside
But denied her the right to touch it.
The party dress lay
Waiting, on the bed.
Her fingers caressed the frills and ribbons
Wishing, - hoping the situation could change.
As the clock slurred on
Her hopes faded.
There would be no party tonight
The lies had been uncovered.
Her mother's disappointment was like a physical pain,
Words had been thrown like punches;
Wounding.
She took the dress over to the open window
Shuddering, she took in the fresh, night air.
The dress floated down through the stillness
And lay, crumpled, on the ground.

Joanne Pearson 5J

FISHING WITH EASE

Calm at the water's edge,
Trout, Grayling, pike and carp drifting down,
My baited hook swans left and right,
The unexpected predator homes in,

The wide manifest jaw, engages attack upon the bait,
The tip of my rod vibrates up and down,
I strike.
Vibrant the fish whilst it entangles my line,
My hand a slow winch,
As I reel in my desecrated catch.

My extended landing net,
Sways upon the water,
A quick last embrace,
The haul is in.

I disengage my attack,
The fish struggles violently to get off,
As I slowly gouge the barbed hook out,
The fish slows in movement,
I place the mirror-like trout in my keep net,
It's life is restored.

Mark Sharp 5H
Steven Edwards 5G

I wave to the last of the guests.
They are leaving with untouched confetti.
You should be here waving with me,
Apparently you couldn't make it.

You used to skip so many school lessons.
We joked about it;
I was secretly impressed.
I never guessed you'd play truant today.

So here I am, in all my finery.
Standing on the grey steps of this holy building.
What use is the church to me now?
You have sinned and I can not forgive you.

The trees lay their leaves at my feet.
The roses in my bouquet tilt their heads to my face
- I look away.
Their petals stroke my immaculate white gown.
I water them with my tears.

You were too childish.
Do you remember the day we got engaged?
You proposed on the swings at the playground.
We celebrated with jelly and ice-cream!

I should have seen that for you it was just another game.
A agreed to play,
But you cheated.
You should carry a Government Health Warning.

Large drops of rain fall,
splattering hard on solid stone.
I gaze jealously at solemn epitaphs,
I want the earth to swallow me, too.

A bitter wind whisks the sympathetic leaves away.
I sit down on a cold, hostile step - not caring about the dress.
Those carefully arranged wisps of hair hang limp.
I tried so hard to look my best - for you...

I didn't want a veil
But you said it was romantic.
Now I'm grateful I have something to hide behind.

But who will hide you?
I was going to obey you,
Love and cherish you until my last hour.
I'm planning revenge
It's not in my nature you understand.
But I savour my hurt.

