

2 The prize-winning poem

Fleur Adcock

It will be typed, of course, and not all in capitals: it will use upper and lower case

in the normal way; and where a space is usual it will have a space. It will probably be on white paper, or possibly blue, but almost certainly not pink.

It will not be decorated with ornamental scroll-work in coloured ink, nor will a photograph of the poet be glued above his or her name, and still less a snap of the poet's children frolicking in a jolly game. The poem will not be about feeling lonely and being fifteen and unless the occasion of the competition is a royal jubilee it will not be about the queen.

It will not be the first poem the author has written in his life and will probably not be about the death of his daughter, son or wife because although to write such elegies fulfils a therapeutic need in large numbers they are deeply depressing for the judges to read.

The title will not be 'Thoughts' or 'Life' or 'I Wonder Why' or 'The Bunny-rabbit's Birthday Party' or 'In Days of Long Gone By'. 'Tis and 'twas, o'er and e'er, and such poetical contractions will not be found

in the chosen poem. Similarly clichés will not abound:

dawn will not herald another bright new day, nor dew sparkle like diamonds in a dell,

nor trees their arms upstretch. Also the poet will be able to spell.

Large meaningless concepts will not be viewed with favour: myriad is out;

infinity is becoming suspect; aeons and galaxies are in some doubt.

Archaisms and inversions will not occur; nymphs will not their fate bemoan.

Apart from this there will be no restrictions upon the style or tone.

What is required is simply the masterpiece we'd all write if we could.

There is only one prescription for it: it's got to be good.

Source: Adcock, Fleur (1983) *Selected Poems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.