

Robert Burns Poetry Competition – Published Category

1st Place Winner

Bluid be thicker than liquor

by Nicola Thorstensen, Anderson's Bay, Dunedin

Short syne, mae auldest bairn approached

And tauld me some dreidfu news.

Wi tremmlin vyce, the subject broached:

‘I’ve decidit tae absteen frae bouse!’

‘Nae skink, nae scuds, nae barley-bree

Shall ever pass atween these lips:

If ye’d seen what I hae ye’d agree

That drink and study do nae mix’.

He ayeweys was an eydent lad

Sae different frae his kin,

Had tae much study driven him mad?

He attempted tae expleen...

“Mynd Uncle Jock, God rest his soul,

Who should hae still bin leevin’,

A hav’rel turn’d when he were fou,

Wi’ his whorin’ and his thievin’.

He wis mair daft than daring –

Oft-times they’d find him, tozie,

Ootside Jean's winnock, declarin'
Undyin' love for Rosie.

He coud hae been weel-aff, for he
Were sonsie, and lang-heidit,
But his luve-bairns cost him sich
He micht as weel hae waddit!

One nicht, sae jakied he had focht
And awmaist lost his trews,
Before he knew it, he had bought
T' gaitherin a round o' bouse!"

At this last, I was sae pit about,
I scarce knawed whit tae say.
No kin o' mine e'er paid for ocht
Save it were theirs to pay.

I gree'd, twere his chyce tae absteen
Tae focus on his learnin
But I didna ken whit he'd see
One nicht, fra' kirk returnin':

"I stopped, tae tie mae shuin,
And gazed upon his eemage
Fra eesome brou tae noble chin,
Tae the haund that held the plumage:

It coud hae been a gless I wis lookin' in,

Sae sel-like he appeared.

He coud hae been mae twin!

Rabbie's mae kin! I ken it!"

Since then, mae lad hae changed his tune;

His fause kyndness keeps him happy.

He scrimps on study but is ne'er wantin

A gude-willie-waught o' nappy.

He's become weel-kent in toun

For Rabbie's songs a-singin'

An aw the lassies swoon

At his near-nakit flingin'.

He mae want Rabbie's docht for verse,

But his drouthiness is – e'en worse!

Blood is thicker than liquor: an unreliable translation

A short time ago, my eldest child approached

And told me some dreadful news.

With trembling voice, the subject broached:

"I've decided to abstain from booze!"

No drink – no beer, no whisky

Shall ever pass between these lips:
If you'd seen what I have you'd agree
That drink and study do not mix."

He always was an ardent lad
So different from his kin,
Had too much study driven him mad?
He attempted to explain...

"Remember Uncle Jock, God rest his soul,
Who should have still been living,
He became a halfwit when he was drunk,
With his dreadful misbehaving.

He was more daft than daring –
Often they'd find him, merry,
Outside Jean's window, declaring
Undying love for Kerry.

He could have been wealthy,
For he was good-natured and clear-headed
But his 'nephews' cost him so much cash
He might as well have wedded!
One night, so drunk he'd had a fight
And almost lost his keys,
Before he knew it, he had bought
The whole pub a round of beers!"

At this last, I was so upset,
I scarcely knew what to say.
No kin of mine paid for anything yet
Unless it were theirs to pay.

I agreed, it was his choice to abstain
To focus on his learning,
But I didn't know what he'd see
One night, from church returning:

"I stopped, to tie my shoe,
And gazed upon his image
From handsome brow to noble chin,
To the hand that held the plumage:

It could have been a mirror I was looking in,
So like me he appeared.
He could have been my twin!
Robbie's my kin! I know it!"

Since then, my son has changed his tune;
His false lineage gives him cheer.
He scrimps on study but is never without
A generous measure of beer.

He's become well-known in town

For Robbie's songs a-singing

And all the young girls swoon

At his oddly-attired dancing.

He may lack Robbie's gift for verse,

But his drunkenness is – even worse!

2nd Place Winner

Building site banter – today's Tam O'Shanter
By C J O'Brien, Company Bay, Dunedin

A tribute to the storytellers and the poets of Scotland, who everybody knows are found these days on building sites on or near the Clyde

Da's gaun oot fer a swallae an' his phone it's bin beepin'
Messages fae ma Maw, who's sat here waitin'
Her hair's done, she's ready, an' she's crabbit as hell
whilst he's gettin' pished doon the Royal Hotel
He's a haverin' bastard on vodka and good craic
Totterin' about, he begins tae trek back

But ma Da, he cannae walk the length o' himsel'
An' he ken the Polis are oot, and they'll smell
him bowfin' wi' drink, an' he needs to gang hame,
So he nicks this auld bike and his pal nicks a gnome.
Wobblin' doon High Street, singin' a sang
'Shonny Boy, the pipes.....' but they'll no sing it fer lang

An' they gets tae the Park and there's naebody there
Jist the shadows, the swings, an' unease in the air
They lie on glass shards, under the bars
Swimming in voddy an' searchin' fer stars

An the gnome, they swear, it starts givin' them evils
and Smurfs are feckin Smurfin' an they're thinkin 'Oh Jesus!

We must be steamin' cos that's us hallucinatin'
An they're tryin' somethin', anythin', to get concentratin'

Ah'm no lyin' Hen but, Michael Jackson comes oot o' the darkness
An' it's Thriller and zombies and pure dead madness
He's seein' deep fried eyebaws and Celtic keep losin'
Andy Bluddy Murray and Camilla are refusin'
to leave him alone, and he's fair paralysed
wi' the night and wi' Scotland an' wi' the gnome's bloody eyes

An' his pal Willy the Tile's screamin' Ah'm no aff me heid!
An they're feart an' wondrin' if they'd rather be deid
An' he's wishin' the Big Yin wud moan doon and save him
Or even some erse wi' face paint shoutin' FREEDOM!
Instead, oot the sandpit all raggedy torn,
Comes the ghaistly spectre of Ozzy Osborne

He's followed by Kylie Minogue and her sister,
An' th' sicht of her hot pants ma Da couldnae resist 'er
He's keen fer a bosie an' tae gie her a poke
But bonnie turns hackit, an' gies him the dry boke

Now this gets too much for ma Da' an' his pal
They're baith screamin' and scramblin' doon tae the canal
Wi' the gnome in his oxter, Da's pushin' the bike
An trippin' and fallin' an' feart tae shite
Ma Da's clenchin' and ragin' and his insides are rottin'

Like tha' scene wi Ewan Mcgregor on the bog in Trainspotting

They hop on the bike, faces awfy dour

Determined to beat their assorted pursuers

Ma Da's oan the crossbar, his bawbags are chaffing

his pal's pedaling like hell and neither ane's laughing

They look at the gnome and they look at the watter

Throw the china behind them, hearin' it shatter

The hunters stoop, scunnered, to pick up the pieces

Escape becomes possible, madness' grip releases

Da trots intae the hoose, a' glaikit an' clarty

Ma maw shouts Ye Bastart! An' giein' it laldy

His claes are a' runcled, he's greetin' an' gurnin'

She's raging to gie him a bloody good skelpin'

But his pal, he slopes aff, awa' to his hame

An' across the nicht air harkit..... ” that feckin gnome.”

3rd Place Winner

ROBBIE BURN'S PLEASURES
By David Fountain, Ashhurst, Palmerston North

thoughts evoked by words of Robert Burns (1759-1796) from Tam O'Shanter. A Tale.

*“But pleasures are like poppies spread
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed”*

Robert! (may I presume?) you say this well
yet you were gone a'for the young men fell

How true to see those heads asway
in fields of France, lives blown away

Like the flower so touched, its petals dropping
those young men fell, their corpses rotting

Where's the pleasure here I chance?
it's only in the General's glance

before they left, battalion steady
Immaculate, ranked and battle ready

But like the petals from the poppy siezed
as soldiers fell, his pleasure ceased

the flying lead their limbs had rent
the mud ran red, the poppies spent

*“...or like the snow falls in the river
A moment white -then melts forever”*

These lines Robbie (I feel more easy), are perfect imagery
the snowflake pure, consumed, to void its very symmetry

and to meld in the stream, become one with the flow
pulled over stones, rills, undercut banks below

No wartime here, your words conjure softness
pure pleasure here, the fate of a flake of frostness

in time to transform to water, gravity tumbling
now just a ripple from white frosting rumbling

*“...or like the rainbows lovely form
evanishing amid the storm”*

The rainbow (Robbie my friend!), you give us now
a thing that's just not there at all

Only in a mystical spectral bow
perfect in form, its colours glow

Like the flake so transparent yet white,
it's made from just water pure and bright

Here now the storm, that chaos of wind
the pot of gold gone now, the bow dimmed

Yet another image of pleasure spent
here for now and so much apparent

then lost forever, the storm has won
thunder cracking as from the gun

But memory now the bow is vanished
and with its loss the pleasure banished

“...Nae man can tether time not tide”

Finally here my wee Robbie Jo (for now we are mates surely bro)
(dear)
You've put it all together.

These words I can see are ones you are saying
with your hand in the air, on your plinth feet a'laying

They summarise the fates of all those perfections
the poppy, the snowflake, the rainbow confection

and bring to mind your thesis profound
that pleasure must be taken when it is found

for it's gone so quick it becomes the past
before you can think its here to last

Thank you Robbie, you've made me think
I'll take up Tam's tale now - of pleasure, of terror and of drink!