

An Open Letter to the Council of the National Eisteddfod of Wales and the Eisteddfod's Board of Trustees.

Dear fellow Eisteddfod-goers,

10 December 2024

In light of the decisions made about **The Drama Medal** competition this year [Rhondda Cynon Taf 2024], and the ensuing fuss, we continue to be very unhappy with the lack of response, clarification and full discussion regarding the issue.

In your statement [13 August 2024], you noted *“We agree that there needs to be a discussion on this year’s competition, and on the endless comments and speculation aired through the press and media over the last few days. We would welcome the opportunity to jointly lead a discussion with the sector in the autumn.”*

It is now early December, and the only event to be organised by you was the partially confidential *“Virtual Symposium” - “Cynrychioli Cynrychiolaeth”* - where the identity of part of the audience was not revealed. Of the two hour discussion among the Panel, chosen by you, **the audience only had the last 15 minutes and asked only 3 questions**, and they were typed in the question box. There was no way of commenting or responding for the remaining 100 minutes, or to what was being said at the time, as you had restricted the comment box. We understand that everyone has very strong feelings, and the desire to avoid any potential legal issues, but why could the comments not have been moderated before publication?

We felt that this was very unfair and didn't constitute a proper **“conversation”** to discuss what happened, the **“competition”** or the *“endless comments and speculation”*. If a Symposium is to be held, shouldn't the “conversation” be completely open for everyone to ask questions and discuss all points?

During the Symposium, the advice was given that the dramatists needed to do more **“research”**, and seek advice and discussion from representatives of the **“community”** or [as you put it] *“the community the dramatist claimed to represent”*. Yet, several examples have been given and noted **that that is the normal and expected process in every rehearsal room** in preparation for the staging of theatrical work. That is when the actors come together with experts from whatever background is needed, to discuss the content of the drama, to suggest improvements and experiences. It is unfair and utterly impossible to expect any dramatist, writer or poet to include the views of every member of the *“community” they have “claimed to represent”*. Is the war in Gaza not conclusive proof of that, since not all Jews share the same opinion, viewpoint and understanding? That was noted by your Panel with the two members of “colour” stating that they do not necessarily agree on the same issues. It has been repeatedly stated that **most characters are mortal**, regardless of gender, race, ancestry, colour, religion or heritage.

The way in which the Eisteddfod has responded to what happened this year undermines the whole basis of every literary competition at the Festival. That is why so many of us continue to be unhappy. This year's winning drama was chosen

by the adjudicators on the basis that it was *“an exciting voice and a fresh perspective for theatre in Wales.”* The adjudicators at the time had no idea who the dramatist was, and that is how it should be. Fair to everyone, without the need to “protect” anyone. Competing under a pseudonym and in secret is **the basic premise of the Eisteddfod’s ancient tradition**. As stated in your *General Rules and Conditions* under *“Confidentiality: All entries must state the number and title of the competition and the competitor’s pseudonym only and endeavour to remove or hide any details that would reveal the competitor’s details”*.

It is therefore clear that the winning drama was **worthy on its literary and theatrical strength**. It was neither the place nor the responsibility of anyone else [except the adjudicator] to question the material, before the dramatist had the opportunity to place it in the hands of the actors. The rehearsal room is the place to interrogate the words and perspectives. That’s the pattern in the world of theatre. You cannot expect every literary adjudicator to be an expert on every human “community”. That’s impossible. By all means, choose adjudicators from different “communities”, but if you were to include tens of individuals, it is unlikely everyone would agree with each other.

You have to admit that your choices this year have stirred a dangerous and concerning hornet’s nest. **The identity, gender, race, ancestry, colour, religion or heritage of the winner should not be revealed until the Ceremony**. If the adjudicators deem the literary work worthy of winning, then it should be awarded the prize, regardless of who the winner is. It is not the responsibility of the Eisteddfod or any other creative individual to question the winning work on the basis of the author’s gender, race, colour, religion or legacy. That runs contrary to all basic principles and can be seen as and considered to be racism.

It was also unfair to expect the Panel to discuss what happened in the context of this particular competition this year without [by their admission] really knowing, [like everyone else], what happened. The constant message received was that there was a *“need to protect”* - but protect who really? What about your responsibility to protect ***all other competitors***, this year and in the future? Potential competitors who remain uncertain and ignorant of what literary crime was committed this year, a crime that justified the cancellation of the entire/whole competition?

We therefore plead for open DISCUSSION by members of the Council and the “Panels” who advised for **a more comprehensive explanation, for the ORIGINAL adjudication to be published IN FULL**, along with the **rationale for the decisions made, so that such a situation can be avoided in future**.

Yours faithfully,

from the 236 of us named below,

(in alphabetical order)



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

