

The Judgment of Words – Part 1

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Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1980, page18-20

Judging orchids is a difficult art. This difficulty is compounded by the need – actually, within the AOS awards system, the requirement – to articulate any given judgment. In judging lingo, this is known as the award description. In this brief article – which I hope will be followed with lengthier and more erudite discussions by other authors – I shall use descriptions and illustrations gathered for the most part from the pages of this issue of the Awards Quarterly. Although I am willing to run the risk of being “judged” a pedant, in the shadier sense of the word, in order to discuss a subject I enjoy, language, I should point out that the examples I have chosen were relatively random selections and in no way reflect adversely or positively on the judgment symbolized by the award. I am concerned only with the language of the award description and its effectiveness.

Let us take the case of one of the orchid world’s most beautiful *Cattleya* hybrid clone, *Brassolaeliocattleya* Ports of Paradise ‘Emerald Isle’, HCC-AM-FCC/AOS. Illustrations of all three flowerings appear here. The award description for the FCC-flowering appears on page 30 of this issue. The HCC-description appears in Volume 2, page 28 and the AM-description in Volume 10, page 14. Read all three descriptions and compare them. If you were given these “word pictures,” without being told to which flowering each belonged, could you ascertain, even if provided with the color illustration, which flowering was which? I could not, even though I would agree that each represented a superb flower. The historical record of a clone traversing an almost untraversable gulf between an HCC and an FCC – the whys and wherefores – is unfortunately somewhat elusive. There is no doubt in my mind that the awards records were consulted at the actual judging before granting the FCC – but, for those of us who must in the future depend totally upon the published award description for our understanding of the award, some comparative statements of assessment would be extremely useful, particularly those pointedly discussing any aspects of the FCC-flowering which were superior to those in the two previously awarded flowerings. Of course, in order to do this properly, the descriptions of the two previous should themselves be detailed and comparative, containing quite possibly some statement as to why the clone did not attain a higher point score than it did. The description of negative qualities is almost as essential as that of positive qualities, when one wishes to build a comparative record.

An example of the constructive use of negative qualities is well represented by two award descriptions in this issue. Consider *Phalaenopsis mariae* ‘Liberty Hill’, CCM/AOS on page 21 and *Paphiopedilum godefroyae* var. *leucochilum* ‘Coral Sue’, AM/AOS on page 22. Color illustrations appear on these center spread pages. The description for the ‘Liberty Hill’ clone begins “A superbly grown, floriferous plant with clean foliage ...” Certainly a hymn of praise! Why then did the clone only receive 82 points, and not above 90, as one might have thought, reading only the above description, phrases common to most CCM-award descriptions? The reason is articulated for the future: “... flowers pale and smaller than usual, but floriferousness overcomes this.” The lower point score is now understandable, given the 20 points allotted to “Quality of Bloom” within the CCM

award. A similar situation exists for the ‘Coral Sue’ clone which gained 87 points with words such as “perfectly formed’ ... clear ivory ... very uniform ... excellent contrast and symmetry ... fine purple stippling ...” Why not an FCC? The intrusion of negative characteristics brings this question into focus for future readers: “one near perfectly formed flower, except for slight cupping on dorsal sepal.” Language such as this is never derogatory to a plant or exhibitor. It is instead a critical aid to all judges.

Consider the question of a clone receiving a second, similar award such as *Phalaenopsis* Joseph Hampton ‘Diane’, AM/AOS. The first AM-flowering of the clone (80 pts.) is reported in Volume 4, page 14; the second AM-flowering (84 pts.) is reported on page 13 of this issue. The first flowering is pictured in color on these pages, the second in black-and-white on page 13. A general improvement from flowering to flowering is noted by an increase in 4 points in the AM score. Although not directly stated, an increase in the number of flowers and buds from six to twenty may be the *only* factor influencing the small point gain. Given the superlatives of “nearly perfectly formed flowers; segments well-overlapped and lying flat ...; heavy substance” of the 80-point description, does one not wonder why an increase of 14 flowers on an obviously fine plant did not result in a higher score? Should not an award description answer such interesting judging questions?

The remaining two points of discussion concerning award descriptions, as represented by the illustrations of *Brassia rhizomatosa* ‘Lil’, CBR/AOS and *Grammatophyllum speciosum* ‘Orchid Jungle’, CHM/AOS, found on pages 4 and 28 of this issue, respectively, concern the award description requirements for the Certificate of Botanical Recognition and the Certificate of Horticultural Merit. The descriptions of these two plants are representative of nearly all the CBR- and CHM-descriptions received in Cambridge thus far. Simply put, they describe the flower and plant, but not, however, in terms of the requirements of the two awards. For example, in what fashion does *Brassia rhizomatosa* ‘Lil’, CBR/AOS fulfill the requirements of “rarity, novelty and educational value”? Each of these three categories should be addressed and articulated in the award description if the recording of the CBR-award is to have any real value. Similarly, does the award description of the obviously attractive *Grammatophyllum speciosum* ‘Orchid Jungle’, CHM/AOS address itself to the main point of that award – “awarded only to well-grown and –flowered species or natural hybrids withoutstanding characteristics such as aesthetic appeal and educational interest which contribute to the horticultural aspects of orchidology.” In other words, what do we “learn” from this plant and why do we “like” it? Difficult, but very intriguing and provocative questions.

Once again, in no way are the above remarks a reflection on the actual judging of the plants under discussion. They are, however, pointed reflections on the language and writing of the descriptions of each plant.