

In two previous articles, under the heading of “The Judgment of Words” (*Awards Quarterly* 11:8–2- and 55–58), I discussed various general problems with respect to the purposes and usefulness of award descriptions. Succinctly summed up, they ain’t been all that great! If this judgment seems a little harsh, as well as ungrammatical, the descriptions speak for themselves. Try this little “quiz” compiled from material appearing in this issue of the Awards Quarterly. In each case, try to determine, from the award description, which A.O.S. award most logically might have been granted. Remember — we are not questioning the awards! We are concerned only with the manner in which the descriptions “explain” the awards.

**F.CC. A.M. H.C.C. C.C.M. C.H.M. C.B.R. A.D. A.Q. J.C.**

**PLANT #1 — *Lycaste* X:** “Well grown robust plant in a 7-inch pot with thirty-four flowers in drooping pose, thirty-four stems; sepals and petals very light, clear apple green, tinged distally faint tawny brown...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANT #2 — *Ascocenda* X:** “Well grown floriferous plant with thirty-three flowers and eleven buds on three spikes; light grape purple with darker tessellation on all segments...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

**Plant #3 — *Dendrobium* X:** “Twenty flowers on six inflorescences; entire flower translucent buttercup yellow with faint mahogany blush, striping on back of sepals and petals; same yellow color becoming canary yellow at center...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

Before proceeding to the answers, which appear at the conclusion of this article, try a few more “translations” of A.O.S. awards via their descriptions. In this instance, all four award descriptions involve clones of a well-known and highly awarded *Paphiopedilum* cross.

**PLANT #4 — *Paphiopedilum* X:** “Well-grown plant with one flower and bud on one stem; entire flower except staminode pale pink dusted and stippled wine-red minute spots...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANT #5 — *Paphiopedilum* X:** “One well-proportioned flower plus one bud on one stem; white overlaid with very pale pink, spotted dark lavender...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANT #6 — *Paphiopedilum* X:** “One pinkish-white flower on a 7.5-cm stem; petals and pouch spotted maroon; good size and stance but dorsal sepal somewhat small and recurved...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANT #7 — Paphiopedilum X:** “One evenly spotted flower on one stem; spots distinct; lip with eggshell spotting; would have scored higher except for reflexing on dorsal sepal...” **Your Award** \_\_\_\_\_

Turn to the end of this article and compare your answers with the correct ones. Anybody flunk? (I did!)

What went wrong? First of all, you may have noted how similar most of the award descriptions sound. Excluding the measurements, the language of each award description centers primarily on color. In most cases, the language is purely descriptive, avoiding any critical assessments. The reader is therefore informed only that, for example, the color was “light grape purple” and is not informed to what degree this “light grape purple” was pleasing or not pleasing to the judges. Without such reference points to help him approximate, in his own mind, the critical atmosphere at the time of the judging, the reader is left at loose ends. He must finally accept the award without understanding, from the award description, why it was granted. (And, of course, it is nearly impossible to guess the award.) In such cases as this — the vast majority — the award description is almost valueless.

In other instances, award descriptions have evolved into “conditioned responses.” For example, **Plant #1** — *Lycaste barringtoniae* ‘Monroe’, CBR/AOS clearly reveals the primrose path down which most C.C.M.-award descriptions have trod. We nearly always expect a C.C.M. whenever a sentence begins “Well-grown and flowered...” Whether or not the C.C.M.-award description, I shall leave to your imaginations. However it is certainly clear that this phrase, by itself or in conjunction with the typical color appraisal, doesn’t begin to discuss the qualities of novelty, rarity or educational value which are the determining characteristics of the Certificate of Botanical Recognition, and which were, theoretically, the reasons for which the most interesting *Lycaste barringtoniae* ‘Monroe’ was granted its C.B.R.

**Plant #3** — *Dendrobium friedricksianum* ‘Harold Walker’, CBR/AOS provides another example in which the award description fails to convey any qualities of that plant which would indicate C.B.R.-status, as defined in the statement of the award in the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*: “May be granted only to healthy, flowering, previously unawarded species or natural hybrids deemed worthy of recognition because of rarity, novelty and educational value...” It is only fair to those who write award descriptions to point out that the present Handbook on Judging and Exhibition makes no attempt to define the three terms characteristic of the C.B.R., leaving such definition up the choice — or quandary — of each individual judge. Nevertheless, however loosely or individually we may define the three categories of rarity, novelty and educational value, we *must* attempt to define them in terms of each C.B.R. award. The award description for *Dendrobium friedricksianum* ‘Harold Walker’, CBR/AOS contains no language even remotely connected to the possible meanings of these three terms.

Lest this seem to be singling out one award description too unfairly, look at the following statistics. In this issue of the *Awards Quarterly*, there were 26 C.B.R.-awarded orchids

recorded. Of the 26, there were 19 award descriptions which made no attempt to link the description of the awarded plant to the defining terms of the C.B.R. Of the remaining 7 C.B.R.-award descriptions, 6 attempted this link. In all cases, however, the attempt was purely nominal, for each description reads similarly to: “*Vanda furva* ‘Bates Orchids’, CBR/AOS — Ten flowers on one spike recognized for educational value, rarity and novelty...” To say *only* this about a C.B.R.-awarded plant is the same as to describe a C.C.M.-awarded plant as “well grown.” In other words, both are redundant. The general terms of each award are not descriptions in themselves. They must be explained as they apply specifically to each individual plant. Of the 26 C.B.R.-award descriptions, only one attempted to explain anything novel, educational or rare about the plant concerned: “*Barbosella circinata* ‘Fox Den’, CBR/AOS — Pale yellow flowers, darker at base, on upright spike well above the foliage; flowers remarkable for being doubly resupinate, ovary coiled about the base of the flower...” Although the novel aspect or educational fact could have been stated more directly, the judges did reveal that they found the double resupination characteristic to be, if not unique to the genus *Barbosella*, certainly rare and therefore of important educational value to interested persons.

Rather than focus too heavily on the evolving and difficult “botanical” awards, consider the problems of informative award descriptions concerning other awards. **Plant #2** — *Ascocenda* Hawaii Sky ‘Nancy’, AM/AOS would appear to have been a logical candidate for a C.C.M. based solely on the award description. Vandas, with three or four inflorescences on a single growth, have after all received Certificates of Cultural Merit. An Award of Merit was granted. The very slight award description, excluding measurements, touches on only two of the categories of a flower award: color (we have already discussed the limitations of color descriptions symbolized by “light grape purple”) and floriferousness. The manner in which *Ascocenda* Hawaii Sky ‘Nancy’ succeeded or failed in the other categories of form, substance, texture, habit of inflorescence et al. in order to gain 80 out of 100 points remains unclarified. This award description is typical of more than 90% of the flower award descriptions in his issue.

An example of a better flower award description can be found: “*Laelia tenebrosa* ‘Bettie McGowan’, AM/AOS — “Two exceptionally large flowers on a strong, tall stem; red-orange sepals and petals with less recurving than normal; large, tubular, flaring white lip veined with dark rose lavender...” In this award description, the reader can at least begin to see the reasons why the judges granted an A.M. of 82 points. Size is qualified, habit of inflorescence is qualified, color is basically explanatory without, unfortunately, being critical, and the shape of the flowers is explained in such a manner as to reveal how this particular clone overcame an inherent “defect” in the normal presentation of the flower segments of the species. It is not yet a superior award description, but it is certainly a helpful and praiseworthy one.

Consider Plants #4, 5, 6 and 7, all various clones of *Paphiopedilum* Vanda M. Pearman. Did you correctly guess the award to **Plant #6** — *Paphiopedilum* Vanda M. Pearman ‘Root’, HCC/AOS? Did you miss entirely on the award to **Plant #5** — *Paphiopedilum* Vanda M. Pearman ‘Happiness’, FCC/AOS? Not only does it seem astonishing (solely from the award description) that Plant #5 received a First Class Certificate of 91 points

(there is little superlative language describing this extraordinary flower), it is also impossible to ascertain why Plant #5 could have received a point score 11 points higher than **Plant #4** — *Paphiopedilum* Vanda M. Pearman ‘Solo’s Pink Profusion’, AM/AOS, or, for that matter, any other similarly ranked clone of this cross.

On the other hand, the award descriptions for Plant #6 and *Plant #7* — *Paphiopedilum* Vanda M. Pearman ‘Gail’, AM/AOS incorporate points of reference for the reader — in this instance negative qualities of each flower — from which the reader can infer the deduction of points to reach the award and point score granted. Obviously, we cannot hope for completely explained reasons for any given award. Language is too elusive and unpredictable. However, we should be able to see within an award description some reasons for an F.C.C. of 91 points as opposed to an A.M. of 80 points.

The award descriptions for Plant #6 and 7 are praiseworthy descriptions in terms of their usefulness. A careful perusal of this issue will find occasional award descriptions which have, more or less cogently, departed from the traditional, fill-in-the-blank syndrome of “well grown ... nile green ... attractive flower” in order to create a new type of award description. This new award description is willing to incorporate both the good qualities — in other words, the reasons why any given flower was given or denied X number of points in determining its final award. Future readers are then able to approximate, to some degree, the critical judging atmosphere at the time of the award; and the points of reference articulated in a good award description can then be used as a viable tool in determining future awards to like plants.

If there is one point in terms of award descriptions we should all remember, it is this. We are not only describing orchids. We are describing particular orchids which have been granted particular awards. There is a great deal of difference between the two procedures.

#### *Answers*

**#1** — C.B.R.; **#2** — A.M. (80 pts); **#3** — C.B.R.; **#4** — A.M. (80 pts); **#5** — F.C.C. (91 pts); **#6** — H.C.C. (78 pts); **#7** — A.M. (81 pts).