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OBERON POETRY MAGAZINE

2018 Winners of the Oberon Poetry Prize

FIRST PRIZE:

“Seven Tanka,” by Melvin Konner

Honorable Mentions:

“Aubade,” by Florence Mondry

“Poem for a Daughter,” by David Tucker



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Judge's Statement

First I need to tell you that there is no such thing as a best poem. It is true of all art and especially true for the very deeply personal expository that is poetry. That is a good thing. Careers have been built around the attempt to define and qualify all kinds of art. These things are worthy pursuits and valuable to our better understanding of the various creative acts of human beings. Poems are not measures of distance or the total of a column of numbers. The things that move each of us, as human beings, cannot be closely defined, carefully described, or well understood. How wonderful.

So now, I have been tasked with looking at the sincerest efforts of a group of fellow travelers and make a judgment about which single one stands out among the others. I do have some level of qualification to do that simply because I too have been writing poems, and seriously, for some forty years. I have to freely admit that I have little idea about the larger value of anything I have ever written, and I find that I am perhaps the worst judge of my own work. If I could do any better than that I might be inclined, based upon the judgment of critics and editors, to write the same kind of poem over and over again as a sure means for approval. That would be my personal nightmare and also make me a fraud. In a recent collection of mine, reviewed by a number of people, there were poems of which I was especially proud that passed unnoticed and un-noted by the reviewers, while others which I saw as almost flippant efforts were held out for praise. In a review in a prominent European journal of my last collection, poems I really felt were strong were not mentioned while a six line poem that I scribbled on a receipt, withdrawn hurriedly from my pocket while standing in a crowd in Mumbai, India, was declared to be the truly brilliant moment in the book. I had a reaction to that. I thought, "Really?"

So here is what you and all poets need to hear.

One showed all the things I described, including *craft*. That one is my choice for this year's prize, "Seven Tanka." I do not even know what a tanka is. It did not matter.

I made two Honorable Mention selections because they were simply too good to ignore, "Aubade" and "Poem for a Daughter." I congratulate all the participants, most especially for your fine efforts. It was my honor and pleasure to experience your poems.

Daniel Thomas Moran

Judge's Biography

Daniel Thomas Moran, born in New York City in 1957, is the author of ten collections of poetry. His eleventh collection, "In the Kingdom of Autumn," will be published by Salmon Poetry in Ireland in 2019. In 2005, he was appointed Poet Laureate by The Legislature of Suffolk County, New York. His collected papers are being archived by The Department of Special Collections at Stony Brook University. He is a retired Clinical Assistant Professor at Boston University's School of Dental Medicine, where he delivered the Commencement Address in 2011. He is Arts Editor for The Humanist magazine in Washington, DC. He and his wife Karen live in Webster, New Hampshire.

PRIZE WINNER

Mel Konner

Seven Tanka

1

Late light decorates
a long afternoon of love.
But the same piled clouds
that make it so beautiful
will soon hide your face from mine.

2

The moon, unfinished,
turns and fills in three clear nights.
But for just us two
there is still no ripening
as we await one far-off moon.

3

Among winter trees
we talk of what is coming.
Thick regret and grief
have twined our lives together,
but green leaves can hide old vines.

4

A less than half moon
declines over desert hills,
chased by streaks of dawn.
A fat, spry jackrabbit bounds
away, chasing his future.

5

A thin shallow mist
romances the desert town.
Reddening lace rims
The blushing hills. It is you,
although from a thousand miles.

6

The red weight rises
from the sea, and all is light.
A pelican wedge
hangs fire, dark in the sun.
Is there a pair among them?

7

At last in dawn light
On the dark wind-chilled water
Two dim swans appear.
But when will I wake to see
Our own brightening dawn?