Adoff wins The Lion and The Unicorn Poetry Award

Arnold Adoff has been named the winner of The Lion and The Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Poetry for his collection Roots and Blues: A Celebration. The journal, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, has sponsored the award since 2005.


“(Roots and Blues is) obviously written by someone who loves the stuff of poetry—the literary kind that lives silently on the page and the kind that is born when sung or chanted—and the stuff his poetry’s about: music, the South, and the lives and traditions of those who lived and made the blues,” judges Michael Heyman, Michael Joseph and Joseph T. Thomas, Jr., write in the essay announcing the award.

The judges also chose two Honor Books: Nan Forler’s Winterberries and Apple Blossoms: Reflections and Flavors of a Mennonite Year, illustrated by Peter Etril Snyder and Requiem: Poems of the Terezín Ghetto by Paul B. Janeczko.

The poems of Forler’s book “trace a year of self-realization as embodied by the ordinary pastimes of a young adolescent Mennonite girl,” the judges write. “Only superficially simple, these lucid and lyrical poems connect readers powerfully to the rich sensuality of the moment, and combine dramatic occasion with a sense of play and creative improvisation.”

In praising Janeczko’s book, the judges admire Janeczko “not just for the temerity required to treat this subject in the form of children’s poetry, but for managing to compose a spare poetic sound—a requiem—appropriate to the unspeakable contraries of the Holocaust.”

The essay announcing the winner appeared in Volume 36, Issue 3 of the journal. The judges also use the announcement as an opportunity to discuss the larger state of children’s poetry in the U.S., including a very critical examination this year of a book authored by television personality Kathie Lee Gifford.

Nevertheless, they add that the 37 books considered for the award did include “several remarkably fine books and a handful of powerful, shapely poems.”

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