

2017 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Poetry Category

First Place: “A Gambit” by Dawson Malloy

Fallow field, silent, waiting.
Field of battle, bleak and grim.
The ravens and the rooks elating,
Hasting from horizons rim.

Tall and proud the towers stand;
Archers aim from crenelations.
Strength of steed, and steel in hand;
Men-at-arms move to their stations.

Vengeful, now the vanguard waits,
Bearing standard, banners high.
Marching soon to meet their fates,
Baring teeth in battle-cry.

Priestly prayers, soldiers blessing.
Kingly crown and sceptre wrought.
Bravest queen, for battle dressing.
Generals scheme with gentle thought.

Shaken shields and shattered helms.
Sound the drums and surge to war.
Clash of weapons, wits, and realms.
White proceeds with pawn-d4.

JUDGE’S COMMENTS:

The first stanza describes the moments before a battle begins, birds circling ominously as they anticipate the carnage to come. Following stanzas extend the description in vivid detail, revealing a medieval scene of archers in towers, mounted knights, and helmeted soldiers carrying shields, all ready for combat. Anticipation builds, until in the final stanza the battle is joined – and we learn in the final line that the battle takes place on a chess board. A second reading deepens the pleasure of the extended metaphor. A gambit is a chess strategy. All the combatants mentioned are chess pieces: rooks, knights, bishops, king and queen, and the first-line foot soldiers, the pawns. Fittingly for a classical, medieval subject, the structure of the poem is traditional. The four-line stanzas are

metrically polished, presented in rhymed, iambic tetrameter, with enough variation to keep the sound interesting. "A Gambit" combines sound and sense to create a pleasing reading experience, worth re-visiting.

Dr. Joel R. Brouwer is retired from teaching English and Communication for 47 years, the last 21 on the faculty at Montcalm Community College. During that time, he taught creative writing and mentored numerous aspiring authors. He also coordinated the statewide LAND Creative Writing Contest for many years. For an example of his writing, consult his travel blog, <https://hippieroadtrip.wordpress.com>