

The Taj

by Roy Jacobstein

They tell you it's a Wonder, a memorial
to love (Shah Jahan for Mumtaz, his wife,
and perhaps, by extension, of all men
for their wives, and vice versa, why not,
even for the very concept of Love,
and not only the Earthly),
that words can never do it justice
nor the glossy photos in the coffee table books;
plus there's the poignant fact
Jahan was imprisoned across the river
by his son, Aurangzeb, just before
the dome was finally joined, and thus condemned
to view the finished edifice he'd never entered
every day those last few years of his long life.
So you show up at 6 AM, part
the burgeoning horde of vendors,
already your sweat-soaked shirt's
glommed to your back, and lo!: shimmering
at a distance, immaculate
white marble and twinned waterborne white reflection
filling the archway with that roseate glow,
taking everyone's breath and yours
as it was meant to do. But they don't tell you
Mumtaz had fourteen children and died in childbirth
at 38, and Jahan had many other wives
who comforted him
and bore him many children
while he held dominion two more decades
before Aurangzeb began to reign.

Roy Jacobstein is an American pediatrician and public health physician working on SRH internationally. His poetry has appeared in many literary journals and anthologies, been featured in Poetry Daily, Verse Daily and "American Life in Poetry: Reintroducing Poetry to America's Newspapers," and included in the textbook LITERATURE: Reading Fiction, Poetry & Drama. His poems have received the Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award; Mid-American Review's James Wright Poetry Prize, and first prize from the American Anthropology Association's Society for Humanistic Anthropology. He has published 5 collections of poetry, including Ripe, winner of the Felix Pollak Poetry Prize and Finalist for the Academy of American Poets' Walt Whitman Award and A Form of Optimism, winner of the Samuel French Morse Poetry Prize.