

# Over the Moon: Birds, Beasts, and Trees-- Celebrating the photographs of Beth Moon



“Aquila”

**Edited by Robbi Nester**

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## Introduction

Art is a game in the sense that in games, players purposely impose limitations on themselves, rules and boundaries that will make the effort immensely more complex and difficult than it would otherwise have been. For poets, fixed forms or prompts shape the words and even the ideas expressed in the poems in unexpected ways. For photographers like Beth Moon, choosing to use the techniques of 19<sup>th</sup> century photography seems to have created a similar effect.

On her website, at <http://www.bethmoon.com/Process3.html>, Moon has described the method of making platinum prints, a form she has chosen for many of her photographs. I will not attempt here, with my meager knowledge of the photographic arts, to do justice to the technique, but will say that she has clearly endeavored by choosing this method to apply the same loving attention to an endangered art form that she has to the similarly endangered subjects of so many of her photographs.

An image that might seem merely beautiful in a modern full color photograph of the sort we might see in *National Geographic* takes on an evocative mystery, a hand-wrought aspect, a step removed from the technological polish modern cameras, with their computerized capacity for automatization, make possible, and this brings the artist back into the picture, reminds us of the work's shaping, the choice of subject, angle, light that went into making the photograph.

It is quite fitting to remind us of the person behind the image rather than endeavoring to present an objective view of the photographic subject, for without our special effort to preserve the ancient trees and plants that so often appear in Moon's work and to remind us of the wonder with which we once viewed the world, we might carelessly obliterate all of it without a thought.

To this choosing and making, ekphrastic poets add another layer of art, creating the palimpsest that is an ekphrastic poem. This process is made all the more complex by the fact that some of these photographs are in themselves products of the ekphrastic art, responding to poetry by Rilke ("Rilke's Bayon") or Dylan Thomas. All art arises from other art, but in ekphrasis, this process is laid bare in a particularly self-conscious way.

When I posed this challenge to write about the photographs of Beth Moon to poets in the U.S. and elsewhere, I was hoping for works that spoke of the images in a variety of ways, from relatively straight forward homages to the artist that described the images in detail and interpreted them to reflections on the image that orbit the original like planetary satellites.

The tone of such works can also range from breathless wonder to humor or sharp, critical commentary, and the subject matter varies as well. So one sees in this collection detailed discussions of natural history, philosophical reflection, personal memoir, political commentary, and almost anything else one may care to imagine.

The subjects of the photograph are given voice or are addressed, personified. Writers weave narratives around the images, taking up the mysteries each presents, illuminating them, making them into the substance of a companion work. Or they may muse about the subjects featured in the photograph, inquiring as the original works seem to require of us into the significance, presence, and spirit embodied by these ancient trees, carnivorous plants, fowl domestic and wild, what they have to teach us as human beings in a world we have shaped for our own comfort and convenience almost to the point of rendering it uninhabitable.

I have sought to emphasize this range of responses by organizing the collection in such a way that it clusters together poems that respond to the same photographs. I have also grouped the poems according to which book by Moon the works belong in.

I want to thank Beth Moon for making and disseminating these amazing images and also to thank Cordon Potts Gallery in San Francisco for making some of these images that appear here available to us for use in this anthology.

Thanks also go out to Cati Porter and Judy Kronenfeld, at *Poemeleon Poetry Journal*, who agreed to host this anthology on their website and also contributed to it themselves. Also thank you Judy and Lavina Blossom for commenting on the draft and on occasional submissions I sent to you.

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Of course, I must thank the poets whose work makes up the substance of this collection, which could not exist without them. Thank you so much for taking up the challenge, whether your work made it into the final product or not. All of you inspire me.



**Sundew**

# ***The Savage Garden***

<http://bethmoon.com/SavageGarden01.html>

**Trumpet Plant**

[http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist\\_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2](http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2)

A champagne flute with an odd lid  
or maybe it is a trumpet with a flat  
mute that no horn player has ever  
put to lips, and should never try.

The blood red shot through white  
and chlorophyll betrays its rich  
appetite. Hunger that opens into  
an eager overturned bell mouth.

Slippery filaments lead to drunken  
slide down where the unheard jazz  
was smelled, a wooing secretion  
that digests slowly, a resting note.

**Tara Betts**

**White Trumpets**

*Inspired by: <http://www.bethmoon.com/SavageGarden04.html>*

A pair of them silently mouth words  
as in a silent film: exaggerated,  
gaping, almost animated —  
spectacular, peculiar. They are:

The newly married.

The mid-life models of bad behavior.

The two widowers causing  
a commotion in the farthest pew  
of the congregation

The two crones arguing  
over a lamb shank at the butcher's counter

Their lips are sweet with nectar  
as they speak their sticky words  
into the mute camera

And we — we are the fly attracted  
by their wide mouths,  
their narcotic smiles,  
their narrow throats inviting us in  
to stay awhile.

**Cati Porter**

Moon photograph title: "Nepenthe Mirabilis"

[http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist\\_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2](http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2)

### **In the Veins of the Pitchers**

The knitting lesson was not a success.  
Out from the heart of the sheep,  
shorn and spun: the lion's roar,  
a brass throat that called for war,  
poured excitement and the ferric scent  
of blood. In the unleashed sound,  
sleep was no longer two sticks  
and a skein, brow unstitched.  
The student of thread had become a soldier.

What of the bones embossing the hills,  
what of the drums in the dirt,  
the desperate beat of hearts at the brink  
of flight or defeat, the searing of hope  
into vein-seams, curling corners of quartz?  
Civilizations later  
only the nepenthe mirabilis know  
how shiny the sharpness,  
how acidic the soil.

**Mary Alexandra Agner and Peg Duthie**

**SunDew**

[http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist\\_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2](http://www.vervegallery.com/?p=artist_gallery&a=BM&g=6&r=2)

Darwin loved you above all other  
protein-hungry plants that feed.  
Clear mucus beads like glistening  
new morning on stalks luring bugs  
into intoxicating enzymes, sticky  
and willing to curl themselves  
around victims. An array of globes  
stems of light, a constellation of glue  
that closes around a prey's kicking.

**Tara Betts**

**After "Savage Garden" by Beth Moon**

*The hypothalamus controls body temperature, hunger, important aspects of parenting and attachment behaviors, thirst, fatigue, sleep, and circadian rhythms. Wikipedia*

Something smooth pressing against the hypothalamus

Invades you in the dream,

Seduces your sleeping spirit.

You are swallowed by the forest.

Now you want everything, body and soul.

Your lips move and your arms reach, but

Your desire is too deep for satisfaction,

Too complete. Nothing the world has to offer,

Not his hard body or the soft sucking of the baby

Will satisfy you, though you take these in.

Nor will the pinpricks on the black sky.

You will waken astounded

By the transparent blue of the morning,

But still thirsty.

**Janet McCann**

# *Thy Kingdom Come*

<http://bethmoon.com/TKC00.html>

## **“Flight of the Raven”**

<http://bethmoon.com/TKC07.html>

**Flight of the Raven***After a photograph by Beth Moon*

He knew he must decide  
between feather and flesh  
the price of transformation  
being nothing less  
than full renunciation  
of his tattered, old life.

To regain our innocence  
we must surrender  
our cherished degree  
in demonology  
denounce  
all intimate familiarity  
with those wily  
spirits of destruction.

In our defense against the howling  
seductive entreaties of the night  
we might clutch youth's mascots  
and all our love, fiercely,  
against our trembling chest.

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Wings are needed not only to fly,

but to keep our balance

Wisdom is becoming

innocent, once more

To innocence, all things are permitted...

We can still become who we were.

**Yahia Lababidi**

**Once a Raven**

After Beth Moon's photograph, "Flight of the Raven"

In another life, we flew together,  
sheltered in the boughs  
of ancient bristlecones, rich with seed.  
Our voices rose, loud and raucous.  
But that was almost beyond memory.  
From the ground, I watch the flocks  
assemble on the wires, the stunted eucalyptus.  
They call to one another  
in a tongue I no longer understand.

Seeker of bright things, there is only  
one way back to harmony.  
With you at my back, like a quiver,  
I become a corvid angel, hunting nothing  
but the sense of flight,  
intimate with clouds and wind.  
My human bones are clumsy,  
far too heavy for this feat, yet I rise  
unencumbered on borrowed wings,  
adept in ways forgotten long ago.

**Robbi Nester**

## The Forest of Heaven

[“Flight of the Raven”]

I carry the raven up the hill with my sister  
to the edge of The Forest of Heaven. I carry it  
strapped to my back, to where I commit  
the memory of flight to dream. I once crossed  
the sky and saw the village where they still make  
paper wings by hand. They still bake their  
bread with blood and the little girls must  
carry their knives ready to flay the giant hare.  
My sister thinks the village is magic, but she  
is still carrying the raven with me to the edge  
of The Forest of Heaven, past the river where  
the miller lives with his wives. If we don't keep  
moving, we are told we will end up as  
one of them. We don't bring water. We look for  
springs along the way. We build a fire  
only if we can start it with a fallen nest we've  
found. The song we sing at the end of the day  
asks the spirit of The Forest of Heaven for  
guidance. It asks if we were not animals  
yesterday, if we still linger in them today  
when we must travel to the old brick cistern  
built by gnomes and giants working together  
for once. Their solidarity is rare, but it is  
legend. My sister and I must be careful  
not to let each other rest our ravens on  
the hillock of the damned. From there  
it is three days more until we reach  
The Forest of Heaven. When we have  
reached it, we will have done service  
to our clan and we may begin our long  
sad journey back to being human

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where every day that we are alive  
we must be fully reminded  
of everything's presence.

**Tim Kahl**

## “Listening to the Sky”



**The Sun Will Not Burn You***After Listening to the Sky*

Girl, when you hold the bird to your ear  
what can she tell you? It will be years  
before you learn the fables of feathers,  
the lessons under wings.

Her ancestors are ghazals in your veins.  
Each day pulses with their celebrations.  
And their failures. Listen: This is birdsong  
outside of expectation, and its requisite shame.

Hers is a call beyond narrative.  
Her beak on your head scarf,  
her lore against your cheek. This is an offering.  
There is no altar. Do not kneel before it.

**Babo Kamel**

**Telephone**

Inspired by: "Listening to the Sky," by Beth Moon

She puts the bird to her ear to listen  
while the dust overcoats her overcoat

Here words sound more like heartbeats  
the gushing blood and the terror of being held,

of wings pressed open involuntarily  
What she hears is a conversation around loss,

that gray flurry of snowdust that covers  
There is no service in this town so all she hears

is the slow stopping of her own heart  
because that is the small bird

and you cannot see the hole in her chest,  
vested as it is in a life worth getting lost for

and for each call a coin is cast.  
and for each message the meaning turns

until what she hears is the hollow  
echo of what was once meant.

**Cati Porter**

**Listening to the Sky**

*after "Listening to the Sky," by Beth Moon*

I am listening for the sky  
in the unbeating breast of this beast,  
this broken sky-piercer,  
seeker of the dawn,  
arrow of the long soft dark.

Pressing my flesh, to its flesh, to its bone.  
Straining my ear  
for the rumors of the moon,  
the secrets of the stars.

Tell me, small wing beat,  
tiny skyline blur, horizon scar,  
what do the other sky things whisper  
while I am asleep?

I feel the unmade bed  
of its body across my face,  
wings spread like comfort  
in a mother's fingers.

My voice is cracked panic  
as I entreat this missile  
of jet and cracked riverbank  
reaching into the clouds.

But it does not speak,  
no sky remains in its lungs,

and I can feel the faultline of its back,  
spine broken as a taproot.

**Torrin Greathouse**

# *Odin's Cove*



**Odin's Cove #7**

## Odin's Cove #7

<http://www.bethmoon.com/Odin'sCove07.html>

Wings so black they look green. If a raven hears gunshots,  
it flies over, happy. Crow-killer, bark-peeler, spike-billed

ego river. In the parking lot the raven walks leaning forward,  
hands back, like a clerk keeping his coattails out of the mud.

Is it true they will eat your dreams down to the fingers?

No, not really, because they would eat those too.

How ravens got so smart:

they open up each other's heads, take out the brains,  
lick them,

put them back.

*Hey Raven, Polar Bear said, while you were away*

*I made love to your wife.*

Raven said, *Hey Polar Bear,*

*when you weren't home I ate all the seals you had bidden in the snow.*

*I found your den and filled it up with shit. Hey Polar Bear,*

*when your wife walks around in circles like she's drunk,*

*ask her who ate both her eyes*

*and then sat on her shoulders*

*laughing.*

Watch and wait: if Magpie eats something  
and doesn't die, drive him off, bogart

the rest. A raven knows it will not live forever,  
but unlike us doesn't complain about it.

Edgar Allen Poe thought he was writing about ravens  
when it was only some crows. A raven can open a baby

abalone with a rock, can open the locked lids  
of dumpsters, open an account in your name

and clean you out faster than a con pulling  
the world's fastest con job. In Nazi Germany,

extermination vans were called Black Ravens.  
Who is smarter, people or God? We invented

a way to play Mendelssohn on the violin;  
God invented ravens. Most ravens can speak

English, German, Dutch, Norse—  
but only to Odin. His names for them:

Thought and Mind. And in Paiute, *Ab'-dab*.  
For the Washo, *Kab'-gebk*. Shoshone, *Hib*.

In German, *der Rabe*. Adjective: *rabenschwarz*  
pitch-black, raven-black,

black as Ravensbrück.

If like the raven you could be the king of all the murdered people  
everywhere,

what would you say to their children?

*Silly people, I set out lumps of fat for you to eat  
in the crook arms of birch trees. You spit it out*

*and said it tasted bitter gall. I gave you sunlight  
and you preferred drain hole and peepshow.*

*Culverts attract you, iron bars, new ways  
to kill things. I may eat the dead deer's*

*entrails splayed beside the car-killed  
carcass, but remember, people,*

*when done, I can fly away.*

*For you, small and on all*

*fours, where will you go,*

*what black sky will*

*ever take you*

*back?*

**Charles Hood**

## The Ravens

After the photograph Odin's Cove #1 by Beth Moon

<http://www.bethmoon.com/Odin'sCove01.html>

Ravens rest on black volcanic rock  
where gray sea flows into the horizon  
of darkening sky. Each has pulled into  
himself, listening in the caverns  
of mind to the god's call.  
There is no good news to carry home.  
Valkyrie have busied themselves  
over bleeding earth. Raven eyes  
have seen beating wings, horses  
mad and wild, snorting their steamy  
breath over a hundred fields where men  
fight and groan and die. Women watch  
fires burn all night, too many bodies  
for grave mounds or graceful ships  
filled with gold and gear, too many starving  
children, too many angry dogs. The ravens  
rustle black wings and rise, seeking  
currents that will carry them back to the tree  
and the god with a single eye, blinded with smoky tears.

**Steve Klepetar**

*Hugin and Munin fly each day  
over the spacious earth.  
I fear for Hugin, that he come not back,  
yet more anxious am I for Munin*  
Grímnismál

### **Odin's Cove**

Mind and Memory fly  
the end is here  
not near but here  
the machine goes on  
but Mind and Memory will not return  
not this time  
not ever  
Fear realized  
strong men shuffle  
there is no regret in this now  
there is peace for some  
stillness and simplicity  
others fight till they understand  
the ravens will not return  
Mind and Memory  
gone  
in this hateful now

**B.C. Petrakos**



## *Augurs and Soothsayers*



<http://bethmoon.com/Augurs00.html>

**Frizzle**

**"Frizzle"**

**<http://www.bethmoon.com/Augurs017.html>**

When you look another creature in the eye  
even if the creature is a chicken with a serious  
beak, you expect that conversation  
is possible. You want to be helpful,  
to smooth the ruffled feathers. We believe  
the language of chickens limited  
to excitement, to fear, but perhaps their steps  
through the dusty yard map out a journey?

Bees, after all, return to the hive  
with directions for the colony, and even ants  
mark their trails for the legions to follow.

Why not these round eyed creatures,  
who would have much to say, if we could  
decipher their gestural language?

**Carol Dorf**

**"Spitzhauben"**

**<http://www.bethmoon.com/Augurs002.html>**

There is something to be said  
for a chicken with a feathered  
top knot. Already, before  
proceeding to the spotted breast,

you know this is a fowl  
to be reckoned with, intolerant  
of excessive handling. Although  
you can be assured of three eggs

more or less a week, she will  
not accept confinement  
flying off to roost in the trees.  
At night, when the raccoons  
and coyotes are out, well then,  
perhaps she will negotiate.

**Carol Dorf**

**Arucana**

<http://www.bethmoon.com/Augurs003.html>

Among our Australorps and Orpingtons,  
beside the Speckled Sussex and the Black  
Cuckoo Marans, four Arucanas thrive,  
their sharp clawed feet scratching the upturned earth  
for any caterpillar still alive  
or any buried grub they may attack  
in unison. Excited voices throng

with each new find: a predatory song  
well understood by every other hen  
in earshot. If they find a coiled snake,  
they'll crowd around, calling for all they're worth  
the warning cry, until a couple take  
the first bites from its flesh, and then again  
the whole flock falls upon this newest prize.

The ravaged scales coil in surprise,  
in vain. It's soon consumed. A tug of war  
breaks out over torn fragments of its skin.  
Savage? Perhaps. But chickens, from their birth,  
are like young dinosaurs confined within  
those tufts of feathers, beautiful before  
you get to know the way their nature runs.

**W.F. Lantry**

# *Portraits of Time*

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood00.html>

## In Love with Trees

I am in love with trees  
I know it sounds daft  
I can't help it  
I love the stability of them

their to and sway  
I love their general health  
the outward persona  
that keeps council of inner griefs

I like how they resist the crack  
of winds the bleach of sun  
Even blighted ponderosa  
and beetled lodgepole

where the sap comes out red and cruciform  
instead of honeyed taffy even then  
as bells toll in browned needles  
they retain an erect dignity.

I want to hold them  
tell them my regret at drinking  
their birth right at fouling the air  
we share breaking their resistance

They ask nothing of me  
stand noble as kings along the ridge  
branches touching or not  
birds coming or not

I love them for their stance  
and for never forgetting  
to reach upward

**C.B. Follett**

## The Remarkable Baobab

Beth Moon, *Avenue of the Baobabs*, <http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood11.html>

The remarkable baobab comes in two types: fat bottle and skinny bottle. The remarkable baobab can make you pregnant—lean against it at your own risk. The remarkable baobab comes in nine types: the African type, the Australian type, six Madagascar types, and a type that only grows on the moon. No, that is a lie. There are three kinds on the moon.

The remarkable baobab has been a bar, a church, a jail, a post office, a hunting blind, a boundary marker, a dance hall, a water tank, and an authorized station to observe the transit of Venus. This one, here, touch it—it is a thousand years old. Let's carve our names in the pink part.

The remarkable baobab has roots that reach into the earth for many miles. This root is the water root and sometimes fish get caught by it, get lifted all the way to the crown of the tree, blinking and shivering in the windy light. Other roots move the rocks around, put them on the path in different patterns. This root likes to wander just below the surface, teasing the grass. This root is the deepest root; it grows not in soil but reaches all the way down into diamonds.

Noah knew the remarkable baobab: it was the first tree he could see, rising out of the water as the Flood receded. Ravens sat in it, laughing. Baobab wood cures snakebites. A girl who got pregnant by a baobab was going to be beaten by her father. Tell me who did this, he said. The tree, the tree, she told him, it is not my fault, it was the tree. He did not entirely believe her but the father went to the tree to demand bride price. He did not get it, but in berating the tree he leaned too close. He become pregnant himself and had to run away to Kinshasa in shame.

After we die my friends and I agree to meet at the Leydsdorp Baobab, next to President. First we shake hands, look at our feet, say, Oh, it happened to you too? But then we need to make some plans. Things need to happen: we can't just stand here all day. My friends want to invite Thomas Aquinas for dinner, but I am not so sure. What about something a little more over-the-counter to start with, maybe LBJ or Elvis? Instead of flowers we could have glowing jars of sea monkeys, and give ant farms as presents. The waitresses all could have big hair. When I try to talk about my idea they make rude noises, look at me like I always park facing the wrong side of the road. *This is why nobody likes you*, they say. Well, you know what, I tell them, there are more baobabs than just this one. You guys just piss me off.

I put my ant farm (still wrapped in nice paper) in a backpack, grab two bottles of Aqua Fina and some crackers, take a compass bearing for due north, and start walking.

**Quiver Tree on Hill**

The days  
drag by  
in blinding

heat,  
but  
only

dusk  
knows  
the wonder

of  
scattered  
starlight.

How  
night  
makes

this  
scarred  
tree

sigh  
like a  
song

that  
slowly  
skiffs

in the  
silvery  
blue.

Standing  
silently  
is

a form  
of  
prayer,

and  
some  
trees

offer  
no  
shade,

but persist  
like a riddle.

No one

replies,

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but the

fading stars

sigh.

**Todd McCarty**

**Quiver Tree on Hill (under Starlight)**

In my life, there's no such thing  
as darkness. All night I swim in light,  
more light than you can see, from stars  
who love me as I love them—completely,  
without question. We reach, touch, fall  
into each other—we are quiver and arrow,  
water and thirst. When my time on earth  
is done, I'll return to my first home—  
stripped of leaves and branches,  
speeding toward a wormhole.

**Cynthia Anderson**

## “Crowhurst Yew”

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood18.html>

**The Crowhurst Yew**

Oldest trees in cemeteries,  
thousand years old, signs of immortality,  
of death. They root in the cadaver's mouth,  
drawing souls, through transpiration, skyward.

In French, it's "if," a tree  
that grows too slow to die,  
deco line, intertwining thigh,  
lumpengargoyle, golem's yawn,

and behind that door,  
a circle bench for twelve,  
a table, gouged-out room, black  
as ear-plug silence. The cell slams shut.

**Tina Kelley**

**The Crowhurst Yew**

Once I knew it well.  
Water sang.  
Clouds flew on wings.  
Trees had doors.

Then I forgot.  
Radios and CDs.  
Crows on power lines.  
Push buttons.

Maybe it's the dimming  
of my eyes, the dulling  
of my teeth, how my feet  
ache. Being all alone.

I turn to simple ways,  
knock on that ill-hung door,  
open inward to the yew,  
sit dark where roots splay,

and ask you, come back  
from the bone yard.  
Beside me, ghost man,  
in the yew love this day.

**Tricia Knoll**

## Tree-child

In some tribes, infants who died were  
thought to have been cheated of  
life. They were buried inside a tree  
in order to share its living.

Wombed cold in a cavity of Black Cottonwood  
a child too young to catch a loose soul from the wind,  
you were given to the secrets  
of trees, sealed with tendrils and rough bark,  
to take your living moments from wood, to gain  
moisture and the small company of beetles,  
to hear the sap as it courses  
along cambium rivers, those tunnels near your left ear  
that carry tomorrow from deep drinking roots  
up along your sheltered body  
to the knuckled joints of branches.

Long ago your flesh fell prey  
to the mandibles of scavenging things, and cold,  
and high winds flayed your past from you,  
leaving alabaster bones doubled in a Q,  
in the polished hollow of this tree.  
The furrowed trunk closed round,  
carrying bits of you upward toward resinous buds.

Someday, long from now,  
when your hollow weakens the tree beyond standing,  
when it breaks at the knees, where you lie curled  
in quiet, then will your old bones fall out  
into leaf rustles and you will be seen again,  
a clutter of bone parts, no longer connected  
but reluctant to let go.

*Inspired by Moon's photograph, "The Crownhurst Yew"*

**C.B. Follett**

**Whittinghame Yew**

I am more of sinewed bark than furling  
Leaf. I turn and return myself into and  
Out of my own ancient limbs, trunk burling  
Beneath the weight of all the years I can  
Recall. I am all that I remember:  
I am bird nests built within the spring green  
Curtains that my branches made in former  
Times. I am another day's unforeseen  
Tragedy as all the woods I was so  
Much a part of fell to flame. I survived.  
I am roots set a thousand years ago.  
I am low limbs chopped by men not alive  
Anymore. I am age old memories  
Of years held in branches, turned a part of me.

**Juleigh Howard-Hobson**

**The Yews of Wakehurst**

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood16.html>

After the photograph by Beth Moon

The yews of Wakehurst sleep on mossy  
mounds at the edge of a deep forest cut  
waiting for the world to weave visionary  
light through tubular roots.

The yews wait with the patience of trees,  
the pull of water through roots that penetrate  
seven worlds, and the silence of ancient,  
interlocking wills. Do not come in darkness,  
stay clear of the webs of dream.

If you approach before sunset, tread  
with care, holding the grace of your own quiet  
thoughts as your breath mingles with theirs,  
and waters of your blood surge with the moon  
pull of watchers whose flesh is air and fire and earth.

**Steve Klepetar**

**To Beth Moon's photograph "The Much Marcle Yew"**

A tree must be old to be empty.

What stays in the undemanding center?

Year after year stretching the outer further out,  
the heartwood slowly dying, all that must be  
released, as though space itself were necessary  
to help the tree claim its place in the world.

What lives there? Humans come, step inside.

Do they sit on the bench they've brought  
and tucked into the hollow? Do they hear  
in their minds the tune that soothes them?

There's room for all the thoughts in the world,  
there's room for the meanings of words.

Do parents bring their children and tell them,  
"Duck in here and feel how air can hold you"?  
Of course they do.

**Grace Marie Grafton**

**<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood17.html>**

**The Linton Yew**

<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood41.html>

You have lived so long,  
only the stars remember  
what you know—the families  
of trees who fell before you,  
processions of animals and insects  
and birds, and humans with  
their strange church of stone—  
you bore witness to them all  
and replied with leaves,  
your canopy expanding  
as your body hollowed  
and began to fail. The sky  
intervened, helped you  
send down a root from  
your crown, guide it  
deep into earth to form  
a new trunk—now firm  
at the heart of gnarled  
and twisted time, shards  
of sun-dappled bole  
splayed like scallop-shells  
around your revival.

**Cynthia Anderson**

**The Linton Yew**

Time

carves

the best

of us

into gnarled

planks

bowing against

the weather.

Pray

for

sun &

stars

relentlessly

silver.

Pray

we

keep

standing

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despite

the hollows

within.

Let such

stubbornness

be beautiful,

necessary

to remain

upright.

Let this

hill

gather

the world

as each

leaf

drifts

downward,

littering

the grass

with undone.

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Pray it is  
enough

to simply  
remain

standing.

**Todd McCarty**

## “Queen Elizabeth Oak”

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood22.htm>

**Survivor**

Riven, your trunk curls  
around a dark hollow--  
somewhere to take shelter  
to share with you  
dreams older  
than all the time  
we can remember.  
For you, we are but  
a brief flicker,  
a blink so recent  
we sound but one short note  
in your long symphony,  
the one you are still writing--  
each word a layer  
of new wood, each breath  
a leaf, reaching for light.  
The great cave of your trunk  
stands as signature  
to a bargain  
struck years ago--  
refusing a simple death  
broken open  
knotted and scarred,  
yet still returning,  
bud and branch, alive,  
each season a phrase  
in your ancient conversation  
with stone and sun  
and the subtle whisper  
of light from distant stars.

**Mary McCarthy**

**THE QUEEN ELIZABETH OAK**

It must have been chilly  
sitting on a throne,  
no central heating,  
plots that freeze  
on your skin. Perhaps

you expected even an oak  
to bow. Even the sun  
can't cajole one  
to tilt the knee. Your people  
called you Gloriana.  
No one is Gloriana.

Wind gets in our bones  
and we think we'll never  
warm up. You wore  
much make-up,  
had many jewels. No oak  
needs those,  
a scepter trunk,  
roots that tunnel deeply,  
grip ground.

A thousand years pass  
like a single cloud.

**Kenneth Pobo**

**Avenue of Oaks**

*After Joseph Fasano*

<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood21.html>

You sit by the road and watch your shadow  
cross the grove of oaks away from you.

The moon dappling you into someone

you no longer know. Like the simple cell  
multiplied      like rain      like mercury.

Your hands heavy with pails of moonlight;

a white fire you fling into the night  
for an answer. How you wondered why this illness  
came to you and whether you will continue

or if even now some dark bird is repeating  
in you its malignant fugue. You've been carrying  
the body so long. Sometimes you want to lose it

like a dark country even though you'll have to return,  
even though memory will ice and crack its way  
through. No one could look at infinity all at once,

just as there is no one to hear every prayer,  
but there is a presence who watches and grows near you  
like these trees, stout and florid faced. God is the stranger

you want to hold in your arms. Your desire for solitude  
a delicious fruit. Maybe you need a lifetime without  
a body to consider the word *open* or the phrase

*it is late for blessings*. You've thought of the way

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you could be carried without form. The way wind  
urges tumbleweed. How it works in you like a thirst

to touch the living. Death is the razor call  
of the crow in these oaks. Then the wind,  
if you are lucky, and its forgiving song.

**Lois P. Jones**

**A Singular Penance**

—Triggered by Moon's "Bowthorpe Oak"

<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood32.html>

As if the act wasn't enough—the taking  
children out of school to see it, the posses

built of the dispossessed, the jeering,  
the rope, the guns, the flies, the fomenting

heat of a sickly summer—postcards were  
made and sold, as if cruelty was worth

commemorating, yours to keep for a nickel.

At the center is the ancient oak coerced

into something it must want no part of,  
the weight of its burden heavy anyway

where it hangs from a lower-most limb as  
men pose next to what their ruined hands

wrought, each wearing their best straw hats.

After walking the horses away and cleanup,

a son cut from the limb and buried, an image  
branded on the eyes of his mother, the tree

persists as they do when they are allowed to,  
and that region's history becomes sealed

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in a time capsule, the tree's ring of a year's  
events, neither close to the scarred bark

nor fresh with new growth buried deep. Just  
there in the middling quiet, easily forgotten.

**Sonia Greenfield**

# “Kapok”

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood06.html>

## The “Kapok” Girls

Three sisters rush into the clearing from three, seven, eleven, arms and hair flying, chins up preparing for the collision that secures their futures together. The jolt is not painful as we might think but metamorphic. Together a larger version of themselves roots, individual skirts polished by wind still frozen in their final flourish. Faces hidden in conversation but limbs stretched toward birds in an ecstasy of wonder. This was generations ago, and they are still talking. We hear them when the wind is from the west.

**Elizabeth Kerlikowske**

**Kapok: Mayan Legend Has It**

the souls of

the dead climb the old

kapok - use

its branches

as highways reaching toward

Heaven - perch, waiting.

**Margo Roby**

**Kapok Tarantella**

Hers is an aging beauty,  
the trunk expanded  
to its final diameter, as the old kapok  
settles into place -- much like  
an elderly elephant - she has lived  
out centuries.

Buttressed roots surround her, swirl  
like a taffeta skirt. Her arms still  
lift, spread in a final tarantella.

**Margo Roby**

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**KING'S CANYON**

<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood39.html>

the sky is the floor

I hear them tell me, "look up"

rise and be as gods

**Susan Rogers**

## “Rilke’s Bayon”



## Time Exposure

Of course it started small.

A seed fell or was blown into a fissure,  
or perhaps was left by a jungle bird  
in a bit of dung. Rain fell, the sun  
shone, and delicate roots gripped tight,  
stretched down, grew long and thick as  
they found soil. The trunk rose, twisted  
and stretched high in a dancer's pose  
above these terraced stones of Angkor Wat.

*Tetrameles nudiflora*, a designation for all  
such trees with shared general traits. But this  
is a photograph, a portrait of one tree  
that holds its limbs high against  
a roiling sky as it perches on the ruins of  
the largest religious monument in the world.  
Beth Moon calls her captured moment--  
and I think she is naming much more than  
the tree—"Rilke's Bayon," after a poem  
about the transience of walls  
and cities, about the fact that a dark forest  
one day removes all names.

We know this, but here is a little more  
reason for humility. A tree weathered centuries  
of shifting climate, grew slowly and quietly over stones  
placed by human hands to form a temple. And yet, if  
we could acknowledge it, neither was ever separate  
from its surroundings, ever apart from the dark forest  
(if you would call it that, ignoring light through the canopy),

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from which all living things arise  
and into which they fall.

**Lavina Blossom**

**Rilke's Bayon**

When your roots, thick as the legs of a Dong Tao chicken  
reached down into the earth. When your body  
twisted up and took over the stones of a crumbling temple  
in an attempt to survive. When the world wanted  
to displace you. When the water made its journey  
and did not return. When you knew your prayers  
would only fall without ripening. Only then,  
when the wind slashed your waist and you called out  
to the stars. An answer. *In you, who were a child once— in you.*

**Lois P. Jones**

**Lonely Examiner**

after Beth Moon "Rilke's Bayon"

When hands are withdrawn and dust survives,  
the soft light creeps in with the rains. Paradise turns  
to mud, but that is no concern to the green eye  
framing the rich narrative of the strangler fig.  
It wriggles its way into the heart of the temple.  
Its grip alarms the escapist's gaze as it squeezes  
the doors. The roof is returned to the ground.  
Then the souls of the high priests are gone.

When hands are withdrawn and dirt resides inside  
The Hall of Dancers, the earth will take up its claim.  
The temple can't wear down the jungle's nerves.  
The rains come, but they can't rinse away the green eye's  
frame. The strangler fig is careful without a care,  
rising up into the registers of strangeness. It is  
an antenna calling for awe to humble its viewers.  
No human can be its muse, just its lonely examiner.

**Tim Kahl**

**Rilke's Bayon**

Each sandstone block, transported, carved by hand,  
fits carefully against the next, recalls  
the mason's skill through centuries of loss,  
but through cleft crevices, the coiling root,  
now serpentine, seeks water, sprawls across  
the careful ashlar of these mitered walls,  
running along the overhanging tiers,

until it finds a seam, and disappears  
somewhere within. In unison, they hold  
the swelling trunk against the monsoon storm,  
against the cloudburst lightning bolts that shoot  
their branched patterns a moment and reform  
themselves within the images foretold,  
within the carvings of these stone reliefs,

as if the earth mirrored itself, motifs  
echoed in sky and stone, in wood and bark,  
structures remade across the centuries,  
and every emulated attribute,  
each mimicked parallel and each reprise,  
balanced, seems time's relentless countermark,  
one we can quickly read and understand.

**W.F. Lantry**

**Rilke's Bayon**

Who is to say  
when a thing is done,  
a life, a path, a portrait?  
Each has a journey  
that ends somewhere,  
even though like love  
each may begin again,  
somewhere else.

We are each like trees.  
We carry our living core  
inside as we grow outward  
and upward into branches  
of being. No matter  
how we move in the wind  
or how full of fruit we become,  
our essence remains the same.

Rilke, you are tree and maker  
of trees. You are spirit and you are form.  
And even now that you are growing  
on some unseen path, painting word portraits  
I cannot know, I do know that you have signed  
this tree, this journey, this life and you  
are beginning again, somewhere else.

**Susan Rogers**

### “Rilke's Bayon”: Everywhere

Our roots seek everywhere as well  
 circling a city, a place of birth, a world  
 of ancestors, the brown lands of childhood parks  
 the el train station where the grandfather I never knew opened  
 his "tea room"  
 before fate emerged from behind the blameless trees  
 Is that my Bayon temple, crumbling among those history-hiding trees?  
 Flushing, Queens County, the still-striving city  
 the looming towers with their roots  
 in Manhattan schist  
 our temple complex, both climbing and crumbling  
 in the postwar bloom of the one essential empire?

What may be said of us  
 after we have seen the stony monuments of Angkor?  
 Sky-topping New York? Paris with its horizontal temples  
 stretching down the regal avenues?  
 Yet everywhere the trees find their place  
 Leaves live on air  
 Roots grow rivers between knees of piled stones  
 making places where there are no places  
 moving like the many-legged monsters of cinema dreams  
 slow mo-ed to ravishing millimeters,  
 vital penetration

They embrace us, trees of our millennia, with their tangled love  
 Grow upon the tablets of arching history  
 carry our roots to the ongoing sky  
 crumble our cities to a smear on  
 an archeologist's hungry screen

walk upon the earth like stationary Sauria from another  
 eon in the wrinkled earth  
 stepping from glacial outwash  
 to the greenhouse glare of day

At the bottom of things as they appear to be  
 lies a dream of tiny mouths crumbling biota  
 with cellular teeth,  
 in the rain forest of the hidden self

The seer embraces them, timeless trees, root and twig  
 lays his face against their pitted skin  
 crawls out upon limbs  
 plumbs their roots  
 reading there, as the tree reads us,  
 the thousand blessings of Bayon  
 its ranked bulbs and demon faces  
 its prayer wheels turned to stone

Distilling men and their passing marvels,  
 the ficus performs its age-old alchemy,  
 waving the earth to gladden sky



## “Ankor Passage”

<http://www.bethmoon.com/TouchWood02.html>

**"ANKOR PASSAGE"***for Beth Moon*

In the overgrown hours  
 between sleep and waking  
 your image poured into my dreaming  
 unrecognized and yet familiar  
 a tree with giant roots descending.  
 Its trunk a living, massive dragon  
 ending in a curving claw.  
 The twisted roots reaching  
 full across blackened stone  
 engulfed an ornamental façade  
 constraining ancient temple walls  
 with wooden ropes, the "shimenawa"  
 of a Khmer shrine. From its chest  
 the mammoth trunk branched  
 an emaciated arm with half-closed hand,  
 elongated fingers, a delicate, ash grey thumb.  
 There was no proof  
 of a dragon's head or fire, only  
 signs of sinking. The tangled roots  
 fallen on weathered stone,  
 sunk into my deepening breath,  
 some cellular memory,  
 interior of bone, the sap inside me rising.

This morning I felt a gentle pull,  
 as if from some unknown anchor.  
 An image surfaced suddenly,  
 sparking from last night's dream:  
 Hikaru Kinenkan, in Takayama, Japan,  
 the museum of art and ancient history.  
 I saw Koryu the golden dragon  
 hovering above a white stone roof.  
 Startled, I recognized the Khmer temple  
 and museum were the same design.  
 It was as if the pattern of one had given rise  
 to the blueprint of the other, or  
 two timelines had somehow joined.  
 But the museum I saw was in bright color,  
 the dragon was no longer wood, but light.

There were no binding ropes to seal her.  
 The doors were open to all.  
 I entered there and walked the passage  
 designed like a tunnel lit in gold.  
 I read on the gallery wall:  
*The origin of the world is one.*  
*The origin of humankind is one.*  
*The origin of all religions is one.*

In the museum courtyard I stopped  
 before the tree they call "Space Cherry,"  
 grown from a seed which had journeyed into space.  
 It was one of only a few such seeds  
 that had returned to earth and flowered.  
 Thinking about its passage from ground to sky,  
 then the return from sky to ground, its history

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of ascending and descending, I bowed.

**Susan Rogers**



**Ankor Passage**

Nature is a dragon  
fearless of monuments  
mere humans build;  
it waits to scale  
abandoned temples  
crumbling in its grip.

**James Penha**

**Ankor Passage**

*after the photo by Beth Moon*

You can  
make a building  
but the Earth  
doesn't care.

**Rick Lupert**

## The Strangler Fig

<http://bethmoon.com/TouchWood15.html>

*It is still the same, my life.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Again and again, the sound  
of bones breaking—  
the mind summoning  
that memory of pried-apart metal,  
the long spine board,  
a twice-shocked heart.

The day my face became  
a five-beer happy-hour road map  
of a drunk driver  
pushing sixty  
around a rain-slick curve.

The year of the fire tiger  
and the barren fig tree,  
I am knife-cut and carved  
in the surgeon's  
amphitheater, pumped full  
of strangers' blood.

That moment I became Rilke's lady  
in the liquid-clear mirror,  
full of mistrust—  
hundreds of stitches tugging at flesh  
to close the infinite line segment  
of torso and mouth.

This is what I see when you offer  
your portraits of time,  
my body the temple  
crumbling slowly  
beneath the weight of a tree.

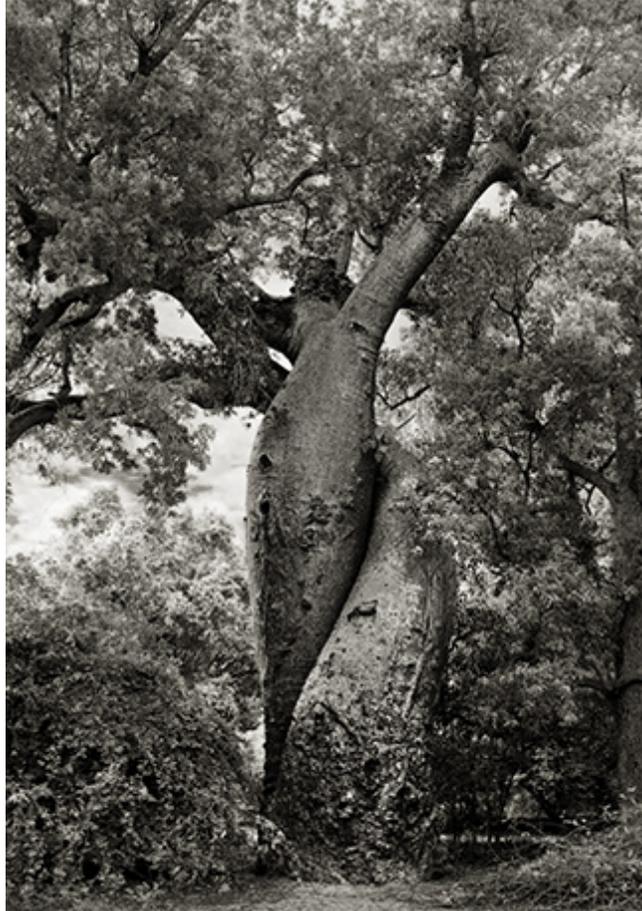
I hear the rumble and crack  
of the strangler fig's roots  
splitting open  
stone pillars and walls,  
the pity-sigh  
of two hundred faces looking on.

History whispers to my future  
that this will define me,  
and yet, and yet, I answer

in the relentless bloom of foliage,  
the twice-bearing of fruit.

**Kristina Moriconi**

## “The Lovers”



**Dance**

Oh no, we are not too old, my love.  
Dance with me beneath the night sky—  
our arms abandoned to the music  
of a million stars. Our hair riotous and untamed  
as in our youth, the tendrils entangled  
with evening dew. Press against me  
as if we were saplings—supple once more—  
our limbs free to touch, enfold, then pull away,  
not this rigid girth set so firmly aground.  
We are ancient. These roots we share go deep.  
But oh, our wild, wild branches!

**Christina Lovin**

## Tango Milonguero

“We dance tango because we have secrets.”  
Marilyn Cole Lownes

They lean in, bending an *apilado*—  
mutual axis united in passion.

Her limb lightly skims his leathered skin—  
a *caricia* of long-time *amor*.

Petrified *parada*—breathless standstill  
that keeps secrets, revealing naught but grace.

Inspired by “The Lovers” from *Portraits of Time* by Beth Moon

## Christina Lovin

*Tango milonguero* Tango in which partners stay closely embraced

*Apilado* The dancers lean in towards each other and share an axis throughout the dance.

*Caricia* One of the dancers runs their foot up the outside edge of their partner’s leg, usually during a *parada*.

*Parada* Brought to a standstill, often with both dancers bending their knees and dipping down.

**“Lovers” of a Certain Age**

Baucis, Philemon

old temple keepers

the moon

knock at the door

unending kindnesses from hosts

guests who might be gods

one wish

that they die together

having lived for so long

as one

another loaf, more wine

thank yous, goodbyes

years pass

Philemon's breath collapsed

he touched his chest

bark, fingertips leaves,

Baucis rooted, climbing

into his arms forever intertwined

again the gods were kind

**Elizabeth Kerlikowske**

## INTIMACY

the lovers  
woven close  
faces gaze  
in opposite directions  
a sliver of space  
between their cheeks

one  
loops like a knit stitch  
right arm high  
grounding balance  
curls encircle his head  
like a crochet cap

the partner  
S-curve in the back  
left arm raised  
to the sky  
their palms meld  
in the clouds  
hair ruffles  
on her shoulders  
a Nippon silk shawl

voyeur  
I steal away  
on the murmur of fallen leaves

Jo Barbara Taylor

**The Lovers**

- by Beth Moon

I've not seen trees in love before,  
but these two -

They met in kindergarten,  
grew into each other's arms,  
learned to winter ice and snow.

Their limbs danced in the wind  
as together they leaved a mansion,  
fed birds and squirrels.

For decades their leaves blushed  
in fall sun, bared branches,  
yet they cling to each other.

They believe in the same root.

**Helga Kidder**

## “Majesty”



**Majesty**

Your hull muscles its way into  
the forest, the 1% of you that's still alive.

Your eyes are not empty. A squirrel  
pops his head out, he's your pupil.

I'm your pupil. By your vigor, how you've  
welcomed the sun, a history of seasons

in your skin. Your great gape offers shelter  
to wrens, bats, children's offerings—such

resonance in your hollow, orisons and sighs.

Your mouth sweetly mossy with songs;

your limbs full of dare and possibility  
and your hair, OMG, your hair!

**Elizabeth Kerlikowske**

**Snow Hair**

*After Beth Moon's photograph of the tree, Majesty*

Owl face opens,  
its voice a slow trawl  
through foggy inlets,  
slivers of ice memory,  
snow hair's ancient beauty new  
each season of melt,  
moon braille carved  
on nights of wind howl,  
by pelting rain and the fingers  
of God; snow hair  
*les cheveux de la neige*, new  
each throng of sedge warblers,  
when bees let honey  
ooze a sweet-mask  
down the trunk –  
fluent in languages  
of soil and time,  
shrinks, stretches, swells,  
weathers the languid  
carousel of stars,  
*el cabello de la nieve*, new  
each ancient spring.

**Cindy Bosquet Harris**

**Majesty**

Time

makes

us more

than we

can imagine.

Does not

diminish

the inward

flame, but

makes majesty

of gnarled and

knotted skin.

Take this tree

simmering

in sunlight,

a brutal silver

the vaulting

leaves above.

An oblong gap  
in the trunk

large enough  
for a slender

woman to sit.

No wind to  
forgive time

bustling by.

A broken

branch shagged  
with autumn

in the green  
fuzz below.

Words  
fell away

long  
ago.

What was  
worth

saving

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now lost

in a prayer

of rain.

**Todd McCarty**

**Yucca Brevifolia, Joshua Tree**

[https://issuu.com/misha1/docs/ancienttrees\\_sample\\_pps\\_flip](https://issuu.com/misha1/docs/ancienttrees_sample_pps_flip)

A desert moth floats unharmed among yucca  
most spiked of lilies. How intimate is

this shaggy forest with survival; for instance,  
Joshua stores water in his trunk. And on occasion

his bristly arms offer bulky cream blooms  
soft scent of smoke. Here, the yucca-moth busy

with pollen, lays her own eggs. Too many?  
the Joshua can abort ovaries. And imagine—

his prayer reaches to clouds heaped in dense blue.  
Come dusk, the bright billows darken, drop

rain through the spun out distance between us,  
plant and human.

**Nancy Scott Campbell**

# *Diamond Nights*

<http://bethmoon.com/DiamondNights.html>



Lyra

## The Body as a Prayer

*after Lyra by Beth Moon & "Lift Yr. Skinny Fists, Like Antennas to Heaven..." by  
Godspeed You! Black Emperor*

<http://bethmoon.com/DN012.html>

Lord,  
tonight my bones are filled with wonder.  
You have bled out  
the sky & filled its corpse  
with sparks.

Tonight the ceiling is on fire,  
you have stolen all that is quiet  
& tender in the dark.

You have chewed on diamonds  
& spilled them across the table  
a procession of brilliant crumbs.

And Lord,  
these hands, they are hungry.  
I have lifted them up into the black  
all broken, a dozen fingers on each.

They are hungry to be swallowed whole,  
to be carried into the air  
to grow into your embrace,

to break their cores against the fishbowl sky,  
picking at stars like lyre strings  
wondering which will be the first to snap.

Lord,

you have made a meal of the nights  
& I am lifting myself up to you  
slender wooden fists  
all my tumbling bones.

I have lifted my entire body  
as a prayer.

My skin is an open mouth.

Feed me your light.

**Torrin Greathouse**

**Sanctuary**

after Beth Moon's "Ara" from *Diamond Nights*

<http://bethmoon.com/DN01.html>

A reverence for baobabs makes sense.

Apart from fruit, there's size and age, a shape  
beyond human writ large, writ long. And here,  
beneath Ara, the star altar that tells

a tale of unity among the gods,  
these trees, roots intertwined, star-struck branches  
enmeshed, mirror community, signal  
a place of sustenance, shelter, water.

This grove oasis, made sacred by need,  
humble altar of thanks made so by all  
who amble through its shade, enjoy its fruit,  
gnaw, famished, through its bark to softer wood.

Crossroads of wild things, of stones and stars,  
its trees sentries of centuries. *Amen.*

**Marta Ferguson**

**untethered**

*thoughts on Beth Moon's "Volans"*

<http://bethmoon.com/DN013.html>

deep run our roots  
into the sanded plains  
seeking, piercing the veins  
the arteries of earth  
pulsing with hydration

solid as rock our bodies  
from thinnest infant sapling  
to massive wooden mammaries  
that nurture each year's  
meager-leafed bonnet  
unmoved by wind  
by time

but in the night, what dreams!  
branches morph to wings  
as drunk with starlight  
we rise from earth to moon  
beyond, if dawn delays

**j.lewis**

**Diamonds of the Night**

This tree looks like a woman trying to hold up the sky.  
Nature is above our head like a disco ball tilting forward and back.  
Like an everlasting dance illuminating our stories through eternity.

**Ellyn Maybe**

*Response to Beth Moon's Diamond Nights "Octans"*

**<http://bethmoon.com/DN08.html>**

**To the Oldest Tree**

Your thoughts are long  
stored in root and cell.  
They begin before there were cities  
before Egypt  
before the earliest  
of our many kings.  
You have seen the stars move  
in their slow procession  
through the houses of the sky.  
You wear them netted  
in your branches like a crown.  
You pull me into your silence  
where there is room enough  
to spin out all the dreams  
and tell all the stories  
of our small lives,  
to remember those first dreamers,  
who came with visions of fire  
and brash ambitions,  
laying stone on stone  
to rebuild the world  
in the image of desire.  
You did not build.  
You grew,  
root and branch  
a library of living cells  
the tides of life responding  
to the pull of distant galaxies,  
the languages of light and gravity  
spelled in the patterns  
of your secret heart.

**Mary McCarthy**

*Response to Beth Moon's Diamond Nights "Andromeda"*  
<http://bethmoon.com/DN07.html>

### **Ancient Trees by Starlight**

We live too fast to see  
your slow waltz  
your finest branches reaching out  
like a web of nerves,  
sensitive as the fingertips  
of the blind,  
reading messages  
written in the light  
of distant galaxies.  
We are like children  
drowsing beneath the hum  
of grown ups' conversation,  
knowing only something more  
than we can apprehend  
sings between the maze of roots  
and the spill of starlight  
through your limbs.  
And so we stand suspended,  
incidental to the long dance  
whose rhythms we can barely sense  
as you turn with the earth  
in the starry arms of Andromeda.

**Mary McCarthy**



# *Island of Dragon's Blood*

<http://bethmoon.com/DBlood00.html>

## “Shebehon Forest”



**Dragon's-Blood Trees**

*After a photograph by Beth Moon, "Shebehon Forest"*

In a dream they once appeared to me,  
upright as shaving brushes,  
the dragon's-blood trees  
of Socotra Island, off the Horn of Africa,  
and here they are again, silver as shadows,  
exposing their undersides, a tangle  
of arterial branches like the gills  
of gigantic mushrooms  
or the intricate crinoline skirts  
of girls tumbling immodestly onto the grass.  
They could be sentient if sessile beings  
from another world, but in fact,  
they are as earthly as we are,  
an everyday part of life for the Socotrans,  
though they seem odd to us.  
I have heard their red sap serves  
as a medicine, a dye, a powerful potion--  
altogether too useful for their own good.

**Robbi Nester**

**Shebehon Forest**

Based on the Beth Moon photo found here: <http://www.bethmoon.com/DBlood008.html>

The dragon's blood flows slowly from old scars,  
gathered in drops, like tears grown crystalline,  
crimson for conjuring. Enchantments need  
dualities: precise configured words  
and earthly wonders: trees that seem to bleed,  
whose interwoven branches redesign  
our deep conceptions of an ancient past

still with us now, their patterns unsurpassed  
by any crafted loom. Note how the long  
stems halve and twist, dividing into pairs,  
and how their buttressed shelter overgirds  
the limestone roots, whose jagged soil bears  
no other leaves. What antique cradlesong  
could have been sung among these trunks to call

on river gods to quench the firefall:  
sunlight reflecting from the garnet-red  
bright surfaces, burnished until they gleam  
like dragon scales, divided into thirds  
as if the landscape of a primal dream  
composed of forking rhythms overhead  
could be remade beneath these tropic stars?

**W.F. Lantry**

**Drinking the Dragon's Blood**

After Beth Moon's "Shade of the Dragon's Blood Tree"

I slit the trunk  
press my mouth  
against rough bark  
suckle like a babe  
gulp in the warmth  
taste the ripeness of sand  
tartness of pomegranate

*sanguis sanguinis mei*  
sap of my veins  
flowing into dust  
rooted through millennia  
seeking hidden aquifers  
quench my parched  
undying thirst

five hundred years  
of barren dreams  
tinkle of goat's bells  
small hoofs kick dry grass  
bleat of early morning  
I rise to greet the mist  
my head a mass of tangled  
limbs and prayers

**Noreen Lawlor**

## “Heart of the Dragon”



**Escape**

Beth Moon, "Heart of the Dragon"

I want to rise and go  
to Socotra, island  
of frankincense and myrrh  
and dragon's blood, and to sit  
in the intensely dense umbra  
of the dragon's blood tree  
under whose protection its offspring  
grow, and to shelter in the innocence  
of unwitting things, and to wait  
for the branches to branch  
into branches that branch,  
to wait the years it takes  
for the leaves to fall,  
for the leaves to simultaneously  
replace the fallen.  
Cut, the tree exudes  
a thick red blood that  
binds wounds—if only blood  
could heal us  
on the mainlands where  
the motherless children  
shoulder guns, or shake  
as they scrape among the ruins,  
where there is war and war  
and will be more war  
world without end.

**Judy Kronenfeld**

***“Heart of the Dragon”***

inspired by the Beth Moon photograph

I would walk through the desert  
seek the unforgiving shade of flame trees  
burn my soles on the stones  
warming geckos' bellies  
taunting my thickened tongue  
my salted brow incapable of sweat  
so desiccated my veins

I would walk through the scrub brush  
forget the smells other than bleached dust  
that stung my nostrils  
and choked my throat  
my mind focused on a horizon  
that danced to a rhythm  
I could not hear, the rabbits  
and mice finding water  
in a language I could not understand

I would walk through the dunes  
until I came to the land  
of dragon's blood trees  
welcome wooden parasols  
and talismans of currents underneath

I would dig and scratch  
with newfound faith in survival  
until I found the trickle  
until I tasted the rivulet  
until I poured sweet drops on my neck

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in a baptism

more welcome than my first

**Heather Bourbeau**

**Appropriation**

Beth Moon, "Heart of the Dragon"

We poets might say: *your branches are the dense*

*web that holds the heavens above us.* Or:

*your branches plait the air we breathe.*

Perhaps we'll crown you *tree of the world*

on which we'll climb to a green

thought, trying to outdo your crown. But oh,

fellow beast-namers, bird-namers, receivers of every

herb that bears seed, of every fruit, negligent

stewards, is this the kind of thinking

that led us down the garden path

in the first place, and out?

Dragon's blood tree whose ancestors

came before us, who might endure beyond us,

if we don't annihilate nature before her time,

can I look at you as you,

and not through my greedy eyes

that make you part of my mind?

Can I take you into myself

and let you be yourself,

you through whom red-flashed starlings

dart, whose berries feed them?

Will I cherish you and your kind because

you're twined with me?

And can that be enough?

**Judy Kronenfeld**

### Contributors' Biographies

Cynthia Anderson lives in the Mojave Desert near Joshua Tree National Park. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Askew*, *Dark Matter*, *Apercus Quarterly*, *Whale Road*, *Knot Magazine*, and *Origami Poems Project*. She is the author of five collections—*In the Mojave*, *Desert Dweller*, *Mythic Rockscapes*, and *Shared Visions I and II*. Cynthia co-edited the anthology *A Bird Black as the Sun: California Poets on Crows & Ravens*.

Mary Alexandra Agner writes of dead women, telescopes, and secrets. Each month her patrons receive science news in verse at <https://www.patreon.com/sciencenewsinverse>.

Lavina Blossom is a painter and mixed media artist as well as a poet. Her poems have appeared in various journals, including *3Elements Review*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Poemeleon*, and *Prompt and Circumstance*. She is an Associate Editor of Poetry for *Inlandia: a Literary Journey*. And she teaches visual art to children and seniors.

Tara Betts is the author of *Break the Habit* and *Arc & Hue*. Her chapbooks include *Never Been Lois Lane*, *7 x 7: kwansabas*, and *THE GREATEST!: An Homage to Muhammad Ali*. Her writing has appeared in *POETRY*, *Obsidian*, *Callaloo*, and several anthologies. Betts earned her MFA at New England College and her Ph.D. in English at Binghamton University. She teaches at University of Illinois-Chicago.

Heather Bourbeau has been published in *100 Word Story*, *Cleaver*, *Duende*, Francis Ford Coppola Winery's *Vendetta Chalkboard*, *Nailed*, *Open City*, and *The Stockholm Review of Literature*. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her journalism has appeared in *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Foreign Policy*. She was a contributing writer to *Not On Our Watch: A Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond* with Don Cheadle and John Prendergast.

Nancy Scott Campbell is a Physical Therapist, a Mediator and has taught English as a Second Language. Her poems have appeared in *frogpond*, *Inlandia*, *Woman In Metaphor* (ekphrastic) among others. Her trade books are titled *Life Is the Poem* and *Moment*. Nancy lives in Palm Springs, enjoys hiking, snow shoeing and body surfing, but has a gift for just sitting around.

Carol Dorf's chapbook *Theory Headed Dragon*, is available through Finishing Line Press. Her poetry has been published in *Spillway*, *Sin Fronteras*, *Antiphon*, *Maintenant*, *OVS*, *Best of Indie Lit New England*, and elsewhere. She is poetry editor of *Talking Writing* and teaches mathematics in Berkeley, CA.

Peg Duthie works at a museum in Nashville, Tennessee. She is the author of *MEASURED EXTRAVAGANCE (Upper Rubber Boot, 2012)* and there's more about her at [nashpanache.com](http://nashpanache.com).

Marta Ferguson is the co-editor of *Drawn to Marvel: Poems from the Comic Books* (Minor Arcana Press, 2014) and the author of *Mustang Sally Pays Her Debt to Wilson Pickett* (Main Street Rag, 2005). Her poetry has appeared in dozens of literary magazines, including *The Cortland Review*, *Poet Lore*, *So to Speak*, *Spillway*, *Rattle*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She is the sole proprietor of Wordhound Writing & Editing Services, LLC (<http://www.wordhound.com>).

Winner of the 2001 National Poetry Book Award from Salmon Press for *At the Turning of the Light*, C.B. Follett has been nominated for nine Pushcart Prizes, as well as ten times as an individual poet. Poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies and she has received many awards and honors both nationally and internationally. She has ten poetry collections and numerous chapbooks. Follett was Poet Laureate of Marin County 2010-2013.

Grace Marie Grafton is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently 'Jester' from Hip Pocket Press. Her themes range from lyrical sonnets to sestinas to experimental prose poems, with a concentration on response to fine art. Her poems have won honors from *The Bellingham*

*Review, Sycamore Review, Keats Soul Making contest, and Poetic Matrix.* Poems recently appear in *Fifth Wednesday, The Cortland Review, Ambush Review, West Trestle Review, and Askeew*, among others.

Torrin A. Greathouse is a Literary Journalism student and governing member of the Uncultivated Rabbits spoken word collective at UC Irvine. They were the 2015 winner of the Orange County Poetry Slam. Torrin's work has been published in several magazines including *Rust + Moth, Chiron Review, Crack the Spine*, and one chapbook *Cosmic Taxi Driver Blues*. They are currently employed as the executive assistant of a sustainable lighting firm. Their previous jobs include security guard, farm hand, antique store clerk, and tattoo artist.

Sonia Greenfield was born and raised in Peekskill, New York, and her poems, essays, and fiction have appeared in a variety of places, including in *2010 Best American Poetry, The Bellevue Literary Review, Cimarron Review, Cream City Review, The Massachusetts Review, and Rattle*. Her book, *Boy with a Halo at the Farmer's Market*, won the 2014 Codhill Poetry Prize. She lives with her husband and son in Los Angeles, California, where she teaches writing at USC.

Cindy Bousquet Harris is a poet and a licensed marriage and family therapist. Her poems can be found in *Blue Heron Review, Eclectica, Indiana Voice Journal, Inlandia: A Literary Journey*, and an anthology from Poetry Contests for a Cause. Cindy lives in southern California with her husband and their children.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson's poetry has appeared in *The Lyric, Trinacria, VerseWisconsin, The Alabama Literary Review, Caduceus, The Liberal Media Made Me Do It! (Nine Toes Press, 2014), The Best of Barefoot Muse (Barefoot Muse), Poem, Revised: 54 Poems, Re-visions, Discussions (Marion Street Press)* and other places. Her work has been nominated for both The Best of the Net and The Pushcart Prize. She loves trees and lives besides a dark forest.

Charles Hood has seen over 5,000 species of birds in the wild, from Tibet to Antarctica. Among other awards, he has received a Fulbright, four Artist-in-Residencies, and a National Science Foundation grant. His book *Partially Excited States* comes out in 2017 from U of Wisconsin Press, followed by *Mouth*, winner the Kenneth Patchen Award, and a nonfiction book about urban nature in Los Angeles. Charles lives and teaches in the Mojave Desert, where he sees hundreds of ravens daily.

Tim Kahl [<http://www.timkahl.com>] is the author of *Possessing Yourself* (CW Books, 2009), *The Century of Travel* (CW Books, 2012) and *The String of Islands* (Dink, 2015). His work has been published in many journals in the US and abroad. He is co-editor of *Clade Song* and is the vice president and events coordinator of The Sacramento Poetry Center. He currently teaches at California State University, Sacramento.

Babo Kamel's poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review, Alligator Juniper, The Grolier Poetry Prize, Contemporary Verse 2* among others. She was a winner of The Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize, which was published in *Lilith Magazine*. Originally from Montreal, she now resides in Venice, Florida.

Lois P. Jones has work published or forthcoming in several anthologies including *The Poet's Quest for God* (Eyewear Publishing), *Wide Awake: Poetry of Los Angeles and Beyond* (The Pacific Coast Poetry Series) *30 Days* (Tupelo Press) and *Good-Bye Mexico* (Texas Review Press). Some publications include *Narrative, American Poetry Journal, One*, (Jacar Press), *Tupelo Quarterly, The Warwick Review, Tiferet, Cider Press Review*, and other journals in the U.S. and abroad. She is the winner of the 2012 Tiferet Poetry Prize and the 2012 Liakoura Prize. Lois is currently co-editing two collections for Glass Lyre Press: the Aeolian Harp and Peace anthologies.

Tina Kelley's third collection of poetry, *Abloom and Awry*, is coming soon from CavanKerry Press. Her other poetry books are *Precise and The Gospel of Galore*, winner of a 2003 Washington State Book Award, and she co-authored *Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope*. Winner of the 2014 New Jersey Poets Prize, she was a reporter at *The New York Times* for a decade, sharing in a staff Pulitzer for coverage of the September 11 attacks.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske's most recent book is *Last Hula* (Standing Rock Cultural arts). She has several pieces in the recently-released *Nothing to Declare: A Guide to the Flash Sequence*. Her poem, "Bottomless Lake" was nominated for a Pushcart this year.

Helga Kidder was born in Germany's Black Forest and lives in the Tennessee hills with her husband and dog. She was awarded an MFA from Vermont College. She is co-founder of the Chattanooga Writers Guild and leads their poetry group. Her poems have been published in many journals. She has three collections of poetry, *Wild Plums* (2012), *Luckier than the Stars* (2013), and *Blackberry Winter* (2016).

Tricia Knoll's poetry appears in numerous journals and anthologies. Her chapbook *Urban Wild* (Finishing Line Press 2014) explores the interactions of humans and wildlife in urban habitat. Her recent book *Ocean's Laughter* (Aldrich Press 2016) combines lyric and eco-poetry about Manzanita, Oregon, a small town on the Oregon coast. Website: [triciaknoll.com](http://triciaknoll.com)

Steve Klepetar's work has appeared widely, and several of his poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Recent collections include *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* and *The Li Bo Poems* (forthcoming) both from Flutter Press.

Robert Knox is a poet, novelist, freelance writer and blogger ([prosegarden.blogspot.com](http://prosegarden.blogspot.com)) on gardening, nature and other subjects. His poems have recently appeared in *Verse-Virtual*, *The Poetry Superhighway*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *These Fragile Lilacs*, *Every Day Poet*, *Off The Coast*, and other journals. He is a contributing writer for Verse-Virtual. A collection of poems, *Gardeners Do It with Their Hands Dirty*, will be published this year by Coda Crab Books.

Judy Kronenfeld's fourth full-length book of poetry, *Bird Flying through the Banquet*, will be published by FutureCycle Press in 2017. Her most recent prior collections are *Shimmer* (WordTech Editions, 2012), and the second edition of *Light Lowering in Diminished Sevenths* (Antrim House, 2012), winner of the 2007 Litchfield Review Poetry Book Prize; her most recent chapbook is *Ghost Nurseries* (Finishing Line, 2005). Her poems have appeared widely in print and online journals and anthologies.

Yahia Lababidi, Egyptian-American, is the author of 6 critically-acclaimed books of poetry and prose. His latest, *Balancing Acts: New & Selected Poems* (1993-2015) debuted at #1 on Amazon's Hot New Releases, in Spring of 2016.

Noreen Lawlor is an artist and a poet who lives in Joshua Tree, California. She has recently published a book of her poems and paintings entitled *Matilija Days* about her experience living in Ojai, California. She has been published in the anthologies of a *A Bird Black as the Sun* and the 2011 and the 2014 *Writing from Inlandia* as well as in *The Sunrunner* magazine.

W.F. Lantry, native of San Diego, currently living in DC, has three collections: *The Terraced Mountain* (Little Red Tree 2015), *The Structure of Desire* (Little Red Tree 2012) winner of a 2013 Nautilus Award, and *The Language of Birds* (Finishing Line 2011). He received his PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Houston. Honors include: *Potomac Review*, *Old Red Kimono*, *Crucible* and *Cutbank* Poetry Prizes and Hackney Literary Award in Poetry.

J. Lewis is an internationally published poet whose work has appeared in print in the U.S. and the U.K. and online in journals from California to Ireland to Nigeria.

Christina Lovin's writing has appeared in over one hundred different literary journals and anthologies, as well as five volumes of poetry--*Echo*, *A Stirring in the Dark*, *Flesh*, *Little Fires*, and *What We Burned for Warmth*. She is the recipient of numerous poetry awards, writing residencies, fellowships, and grants, most notably the Al Smith Fellowship from Kentucky Arts Council, Kentucky Foundation for Women, and Elizabeth George Foundation Grant.

Los Angeles poet Rick Lupert created *The Poetry Super Highway* (<http://poetrysuperhighway.com>) and hosted the Cobalt Cafe weekly reading for almost 21 years. He's authored 17 collections of poetry, most recently *Making Love to the 50 Ft. Woman* and edited the anthologies *Ekphrastia Gone Wild*, *A Poet's Haggadah*, and *The Night Goes on All Night*. He's widely published and reads his poetry wherever they let him.

Ellyn Maybe, Southern California based poet, United States Artist nominee 2012, has performed both nationally and internationally as a solo artist and with her band. Her work has been included in many anthologies and she is the author of numerous books and a critically

acclaimed poetry/music album, *Rodeo for the Sheepish* (Hen House Studios). In addition to her band, her latest poetry/music project is called *ellyn & robbie*.

Janet McCann taught for 47 years at Texas A&M University, and is now retired. Most recent book of poetry: *The Crone at the Casino*, Lamar University Press, 2014. Most recent chapbook: *The Dancing House*, Red Bird Chapbooks, 2015.

Mary McCarthy has always been a writer but spent most of her working life as a Registered Nurse. She has had work published in many print and online journals, including *Third Wednesday*, *Earth's Daughters*, *The Evening Street Review*, *Camel Saloon* and *Gnarled Oak*. She was a Pushcart Prize nominee and has work forthcoming in *Three Elements* and *Silver Birch Press*.

Todd McCarty's poems have appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Quiddity*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Verse Daily*, and other journals. He is a recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Grant and a Vermont Studio Center residency. Blue Press Books published his chapbook, *Fall for You*, and he lives in Chicago.

Kristina Moriconi is a poet, an essayist, and a visual artist. She is the author of the chapbook, *No Such Place* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). Her work has appeared in a variety of journals—her lyric essays most recently in *Cobalt Review* and *Crab Creek Review* and her poetry in *Change Seven* and *December*. In 2014, she was named the Montgomery County, Pennsylvania Poet Laureate. She lives and teaches now in suburban Philadelphia.

Robbi Nester is the author of an ekphrastic chapbook, *Balance* (White Violet, 2012) and a collection of poems, *A Likely Story* (Moon Tide, 2014). She also edited the anthology *The Liberal Media Made Me Do It!* (Nine Toes, 2014). Her poems appear regularly in *Verse-Virtual*, and have been published in many other journals, anthologies, and websites.

BC Petrakos is a storyteller, performance artist, award-winning playwright and Pushcart & Best Of The Web—nominated writer. She is a widely published poet whose work can be found in literary magazines and anthologies including *Poetic Diversity*, *Falling Star*, *Voices of New Women Writers* (Duke University Press), *Magna Poets*, *Houston Literary Review*, *Red Fez*, *Three Rooms Press*, *Oakland Review*, and many more. She is a founding member of International Word Bank Productions and CFO of Baxter Daniels Ink Press. Her work has been adapted into screenplays now in development.

A native New Yorker, James Penha has lived for the past quarter-century in Indonesia. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and in poetry. His essay "It's Been a Long Time Coming" was featured in *The New York Times* "Modern Love" column in April 2016. Penha edits *TheNewVerse.News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. @JamesPenha

Kenneth Pobo has a new book out from Blue Light Press called *Bend of Quiet*. His work has appeared in: *Indiana Review*, *Nimrod*, *Mudfish*, *Hawaii Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Amsterdam Review*, and elsewhere.

Cati Porter is the author of *Seven Floors Up*, *My Skies of Small Horses*, and five chapbooks, most recently *The Body, Like Bread*. Her third full-length collection, *The Body at a Loss*, is forthcoming from CavanKerry Press. She is founder and editor of *Poemeleon: A Journal of Poetry* and executive director of the Inlandia Institute. She lives in Riverside, California, with her husband and two teenage sons.

Margo Roby has published poetry in journals such as *Waterways*, *Reconnaissance*, and the *Found Poetry Review*. She has two micro-chapbooks published by the Origami Poetry Project and was one of *The Mayo Review's* featured poets in their 25th anniversary issue, in 2015.

Susan Rogers is a practitioner of Sukyo Mahikari—a spiritual practice promoting positive thoughts, words and action. [www.sukyomahikari.org](http://www.sukyomahikari.org) Her poetry was in *Pacific Asia*

Museum's award winning audio tour and is included in numerous anthologies and journals including The Best Poems of San Diego, Kyoto Journal, Pirene's Fountain, Tiferet and Saint Julian's Press. She was nominated for a Pushcart in 2013. Lois P. Jones interviewed her for KPFK's Poet's Café.

Jo Barbara Taylor lives near Raleigh, NC. Her poems and academic writing have appeared in journals, magazines, anthologies and online, most recently in Grey Sparrow and Boston Literary Magazine. She has published four chapbooks, and a full-length collection is forthcoming.