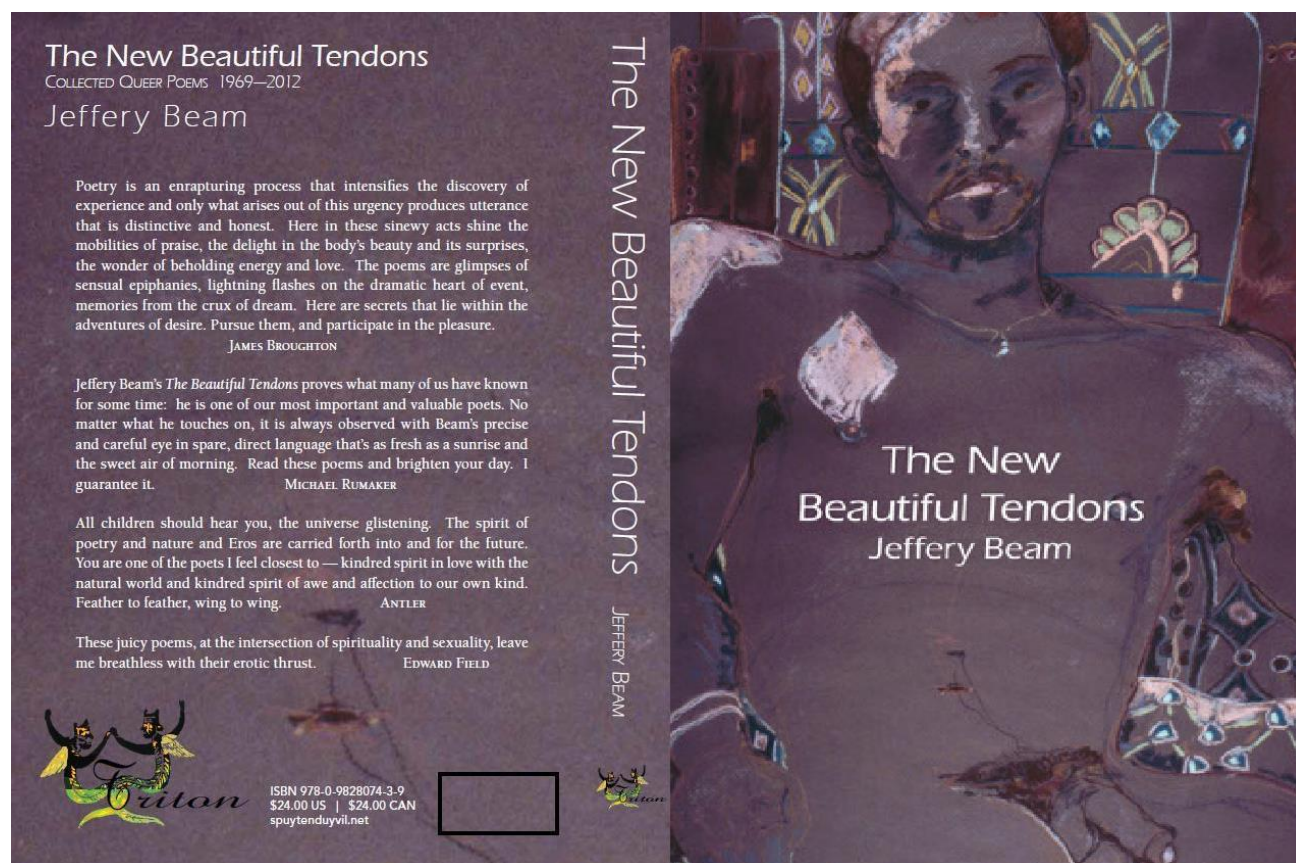


Reviews of the second expanded edition, THE NEW BEAUTIFUL TENDONS: COLLECTED QUEER POEMS 1969 – 2012:



[Purchase the book here.](#)

"I have never wanted to / write / the perfect poem, only / the im / perfect, as the human is..." That's how Jeffery Beam begins one of the lyrics that he feels best expresses his constant state of becoming. Beam's latest is *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012* (Spuyten Duyvil), an expanded edition of a 2008 volume that was long-listed for the Lambda Book Award. Tantamount to a collected works, this book offers the revelatory arc of an essential poet's career.

—Critic **Chris Vitiello** in *Indy Week*, October 25, 2012, Local readings designated an *Indy Pick*.

Four years ago I reviewed a book with a similar title as this by the same author but then it was a volume of uncollected queer poetry and it stopped at 2007. Now Jeffery Beam has updated his book and gives us 43 years of his lush and beautiful poetry. Beam has the ability to be lyrical and dramatic, metaphysical and sensual—the very same words I used in my original review. Beam characterizes himself as “a Queer poet, child-like, saintly, sees the Kingdom of Heaven in every leaf, every drop of blood spilled, every meal, every automobile, every homeless person’s cardboard box, every bright mansion, and every bird song. The Queer-spirit sees All-in-All in every act of love”. With a self-description like this, it is easy to see how Beam can write so beautifully. If I had to choose a poet who brought queer poetry to literature in would have to be Jeffery Beam and he is the first gay poet I ever reviewed and always has remained on the top of my list when I am asked to recommend a contemporary gay poet. His words speak to me directly and I stand amazed at how he is able to bring the erotic and the tender together. He writes... with a grace that we do not often see in queer literature and his themes of desire, contemplation, passion and love are handled delicately as only a poet can do. He gives us a gift of love and spirituality and we do not owe him anything in return aside from reading his work. There are ways of saying things poetically and these are based on the experience of the author and while something may be quite dear to him, it might not mean anything to us, right? This is not the case with Jeffery Beam—

every word he writes is to be shared and while you may feel like you are a voyeur that is what Beam wants. What we think is extremely personal. Beam shares with us and I am so proud to be listed on the thanks page and quoted in a blurb. Let me clarify something here—I do not know Jeffery Beam personally; we have never met but I remember when I received the original “Beautiful Tendons”, I felt I had received a wonderful gift from a new friend. Beam and I have exchanged short emails over the last few years and even though we have never physically seen each other, there is feeling in the notes that are sent back and forth (and no, that is not the reason I am giving him a rave review—I am doing so because he is an excellent, wonderful poet). Beam has added some new poems to the other collection which brings us to 215 poems and poem sequences as well as line drawings and three pastel portraits by North Carolinian artist Sue Anderson and previously unseen photographs by Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden and other special treats. There is also a new introduction by Beam himself. Now stop reading this review and get yourself a copy of *The New Beautiful Tendons*, have a drink, sit down, relax, read and feel Beam’s words. (Can you tell how much I love this man’s work?).
—Gay Jewish activist, writer, and teacher **Amos Lassen** on his blog [Reviews by Amos Lassen](#) November 2012

I bought and read *The New Beautiful Tendons*, and it’s a staggeringly accomplished and morally beautifully volume. In poem after poem, you dig deep and then deeper, and you find the perfect language for a moment in life or time. I could list my favorites but that would take a long time indeed. I might just mention “On a Japanese Woodcut,” which I found profoundly lovely and heartbreaking. I am straight but not narrow, and while the strong voice of these poems celebrates gay life, I am reminded, page by page, that we are not that different inside. It was a joy to read this book, and I’m so glad you write. Keep it going, my friend. You honor us all with your work.
—Poet **Philip Lee Williams** (email, December 2012)

Reviews of the first edition, THE BEAUTIFUL TENDONS: UNCOLLECTED QUEER POEMS 1969 – 2007:

Nominee for a Pushcart Prize, a Lambda Book Award (long list), and an American Library Association GLBT-RT Stonewall Award.

Interview. WordPlay with Jeff Davis, WPVM 103.5 FM Asheville, NC. Sunday, July 20, 2008. 60 minutes. [Blog about interview and Beam.](#)

Radio interview, The State of Things with Frank Stasio, NPR WUNC-FM 91.5, University of North Carolina, September 25, 2008.

Reading from *The Beautiful Tendons* selected by [The Independent Weekly](#) as an “**Our Pick**” for the week’s events, week of October 9, 2008. “He writes with great affection of the physical world and ruminates on the spiritual quest inspired by his Christian upbringing in the “redneck” textile town of Kannapolis, N.C.”

These juicy poems, at the intersection of spirituality and sexuality, leave me breathless with their erotic thrust.”
—Poet **Edward Field**

Poetry is an enrapturing process that intensifies the discovery of experience and only what arises out of this urgency produces utterance that is distinctive and honest. Here in these sinewy acts shine the mobilities of praise, the delight in the body’s beauty and its surprises, the wonder of beholding energy and love. The poems are glimpses of sensual epiphanies, lightning flashes on the dramatic heart of event, memories from the crux of dream. Here are secrets that lie within the adventures of desire. Pursue them, and participate in the pleasure.
—*The late James Broughton*

Jeffery Beam’s *The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems 1969-2007* proves what many of us have known for some time: he is one of our most important and valuable poets. Beam’s amazed eyes in his own enchanted part of the forest he dwells in in North Carolina are as wondrously seeing as Eudora Welty’s own gaze at the beloved flowers she carefully tended, along with her mother, in her own front yard down in Jackson, Mississippi. Within and beyond his garden of verses, Beam’s poems are as stirring and radiant as Eudora’s own prose. This is clearly evident in this batch of uncollected works that alight on the mysteries of his garden but also ranges beyond it into

other wide fields, including a richly alive two-spirit consciousness, sensuous and penetrating of body and soul conjoined in song, "simple praise-songs ... simply songs of pleasure." No matter what he touches on, it is always observed with Beam's precise and careful eye in spare, direct language that's as fresh as a sunrise and the sweet air of morning. Read these poems and brighten your day. I guarantee it.

—Novelist and memoirist **Michael Rumaker**

All children should hear you, the universe glistening. The spirit of poetry and nature and Eros are carried forth into and for the future. You are one of the poets I feel closest to – kindred spirit in love with the natural world and kindred spirit of awe and affection to our own kind. Feather to feather, wing to wing.

—Poet and environmentalist **Antler**

The gift to the reader is this: an accomplished, graceful writer sharing work from over thirty years, poems that sing from the heart of desire. Poetry of contemplation, lived experience and Passion; Beam's voice is joyful, carnal, and worshipful. "Take it, / and take it gladly " he exhorts. We are made richer by accepting.

—Poet, writer, and activist **Andy Quan**

The lyrics of *Beautiful Tendons* do what poems ought to do. They brim with melancholy and love, a poignant tenderness and a delicious eroticism, the beauties of humanity and the natural world. They combine thoughtful and evocative depths with a pellucid simplicity of phrasing. Like Whitman's work, they celebrate both the body and the soul. What a luxury and a delight to have so many of Jeffery Beam's poems in one handsome volume.

—Poet, fiction writer, memoirist, and activist, **Jeff Mann**

The Beautiful Tendons brings together over three and half decades of Jeffery Beam's queer-centered and homoerotic verse. Not surprisingly, therefore, it offers a view into a poetic universe that feels simultaneously intimate and far ranging. Happily, it is a universe that, in this poet's hands, is well worth getting to know. Beam, the author of several other print collections as well as an audio / spoken word work, clearly wants to claim his place in the lineage of Whitman with this collection. The work rings with the same vitality and enlarged vision of the possibilities of the body, of the erotic. It is marked by the same cult of the "wild" mystic and the same generous pantheism. Many of the poems crackle with fire... In other cases, the poems are smaller, quieter without losing power... In both the quiet and more vatic registers Beam's poems seem to work towards an openness, a kind of ecstasy—in the original sense of that word, a transport out of the body, here to a hypothetical space beyond the confines of ordinary language itself, since we're dealing with writing. In their best moments, these poems do somehow or other manage to press against such limits, of sound, sense, imagination and when they do, sex and soul, landscape and language manage to come together with a kind of glittering joy. In other cases they almost do, and just once in while they fold into a sort of soft abstractness... that faintly recall(s) the most exasperating weaknesses, both sentimental and intellectual, of the "New Age." Of course, it may be the fate of every ecstasy to be followed by a comedown. However, great sections of the collection soar above such problems of focus by anchoring the surging rhetoric to concrete reference points... He is particularly able as a poet of sensibility and visual response.

Work like the Von Gloedon sequence, and the more successful poems of pleasure and ecstasy are what one takes away from the pages of *The Beautiful Tendons*, and one remembers them for their energy and their audacity. Beam is poet of evident large ambitions and, to a significant extent he succeeds in achieving them.

—Peter Dubé in **Ashé Journal: The Journal of Experimental Spirituality**

The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems 1969-2007 is a fascinating collection of verse by Jeffrey Beam that combine sexuality and spirituality to the benefit of both. Beam has been writing for almost four decades; and any literary gay man who is unaware of Beam or his poems ought to be ashamed of himself! If anything, *The Beautiful Tendons* serves as a good introduction to this unjustly ignored artist.

—**Jesse Monteagudo** in *AfterElton: News, Reviews and Commentary on Gay and Bisexual Men in Entertainment and the Media* (July 16, 2008)

Though the work here was chosen for its subject—male love and friendship—it offers an excellent sampling of all that that's valuable in this poet, whose work ought to be more familiar to readers of poetry than it is. An unrelenting intelligence drives Beam's poems toward an agenda that's mystical, sexual, pantheist. He is one of Whitman's wild children... Passionate and wistful, these are poems about the spirit of love, and the mysteries of affection, not the sexual result thereof. The skill displayed in these 75 or so poems is often extraordinary. "A Man Mutilated by Desire,"

written in the manner of Cesar Vallejo, just about outdoes the master, and demonstrates Beam's ability to replicate poems of any type or in any style.

Meanwhile in poems such as the one that lends the book its title, Beam's own style—precise, pared down—moves images and ideas along in ways that consistently surprise and delight. The 7 terse lines of "I Fell in Love With" rise to the level of Chinese masters such as Confucius as they skillfully build around his tree metaphor to capture the one thing about love there is to regret: its brevity. The success of these poems, and the poet's work generally, owes to Beam's consistent focus on developing a thought and allowing us to watch it move, grow, die without embellishment or gimmicks. He is the rare thing, a poet of depth and complexity who takes evident satisfaction in making himself understood.

—Poet and critic, **Jim Cory**, from the unedited version of the review which appeared in **The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide** vol. XV, no. 5, September – October 2008

The Beautiful Tendons is a splendor, a beautiful tribute to the body, never sinking to mere vulgarity, but a real paean to the body and to where it may lead.

—Novelist **H. E. Francis**

Beam's poetry, most emphatically, is not a poetry of gay culture but of the communion between the gay man and nature, both his own nature and that more general Nature ... More than that, his poetry dramatises a communion between a naturalised gay man and a spiritualised nature. Through the use of a poetic line that echoes both Whitman and Carlos Williams via Rumi, Beam combines the physical and the contemplative: sexuality and spirituality are fused in the perspective of the naturalist, in the observance of nature. In particular, naturalism allows Beam to achieve a use of sexual euphemism that avoids the bathos of clinical or colloquial vocabularies (the 'brown gleam' above, for example).

The overall effect is that of an idyll. Removed from daily urban life, untarnished by contemporary culture and clothing, Beam rediscovers the male body in the presence of itself. For this is what Beam renders brilliantly in his verse: the body at ease with itself. Magically, this ease is arrived at by an imperfection or, rather, an incompleteness of the verse, a fragmentation that registers as a quality of openness to the reader. Never the hard crystalline flawlessness of early imagist verse, we rather find here the leisurely listlessness of the body in repose. Appositely Beam keeps syntax to a minimum – the sense of a poem gathering via a paratactic constellation of words rather than through grammatical formalities. This technique, or seeming avoidance of technique, works to draw the reader into the sensuality of the image which is not described so much as evoked.

—**Jonathan Statham** in [Chroma](#) (London) 2008

The Beautiful Tendons is a collection of award winning poems by Jeffery Beam. The poems are lyrical and metaphysical as well as sensual and dramatic. There is melancholia and love in the poetry and they are both tender and erotic brimming with sensuousness. Beam's poetry is of both the body and the soul. Beam characterizes himself as "a Queer poet, child-like, saintly," seeing "the Kingdom of Heaven in every leaf, every drop of blood spilled, every meal, every automobile, every homeless person's cardboard box, every bright mansion, and every bird song. The Queer-spirit sees All-in-All in every act of love." With a self-description like this, it is easy to see how Beam could write so beautifully. Here is a collection of poems that is accomplished and graceful as they speak of desire, contemplation and passion. It is Beam's experience and spirituality that makes these poems such a gift.

—Gay Jewish activist, writer, and teacher [Amos Lassen](#) on his blog, originally posted on Amazon.com

Jeffrey Beam's new book, **The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems - 1969-2007**, takes its readers into a world where surface and fashion do not suffice. With a clarity that few poets command, he evokes an awareness of what it is like to live within a world defined by homosexuality and its pleasures. Beam is one of our foremost lyric poets; he speaks with delicate precision ... Beam is a very wise and knowing poet. **The Beautiful Tendons** deals with matters that appear unknown to the majority -and are, therefore, queer. Yet they are beautiful. At the very least, Beam offers an entry into a state of being as inevitable and certain as any.

—Richard Franklin in **Talisman**, #36-37, Fall 2008 / Winter 2009

At their best, these poems are not merely about the oppressions suffered as a gay man or as someone queer; rather, the most moving poems depict the joys and pains of what it means to be fully human. The spiritual and transcendent trump the political in *Tendons*.

—**Jay Bonner** in [Asheville Poetry Review](#), Vol. 16, no. 1 (2009)

Temperamentally, I feel a marked affinity for Young among the three poets presented here because of his cultural interests, such as painting and music, and also the relative accessibility of most of his poems, but I regard Jeffery Beam as the premier craftsman among the three of them and I find myself returning to his most often even though to me many of his poems are spare and obscure....

Jeffery Beam's volume, *The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems 1969–2007*, is an assemblage that spans nearly 40 years. It displays a variety of styles that I found to represent an active, searching, creative mind that is evolving and ever reinventing his craft. In an opening introduction, "The Visionary Company of Love," he provides some autobiographical background that offers a context, and a philosophical approach to his work as a poet: growing up "Queer" in the conservative religious environment of North Carolina.... I do recommend it as interesting and illuminating background to the poems. Beam's poems are the most explicitly sexual and the most self-consciously erotic in the three volumes under consideration here. Beam enjoys eroticism and revels in it, unlike Bell, for example, who struggles with it. I can see influences of Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, and especially Asian styles from Japan and China in Beam's poems. A lot of his poetry is very minimalistic, too much so for my taste. This extreme condensation makes the poetry less accessible. There is much more going on in the poet's head than is conveyed on the page for the reader. This kind of poetry calls on the reader to exercise his imagination or to be satisfied with fragments. Sometimes the poems seem almost like private communications that only someone very close to the writer would understand. References and continuity become so obscure that one can become lost.... This same enigmatic style is often seen in poets from East Asian societies, where the offering in the poem is so skeletal that one is faced with something akin to an artifact from a remote society whose significance is completely elusive. I want to see the writer and his subject a little more clearly. However, there is considerable range in these poems and many are much more immediate and concrete.

I especially liked the section titled "Von Gloeden." This section is approximately 20 pages. Each page displays a photograph of a nude male (or males) by the German photographer Wilhem von Gloeden (1856–1931). Beneath each photograph is a short poem inspired by the photograph. The poems are not exactly commentary on the photographs, rather they seem to be Beam's own associations to the photograph. The photographs are very striking and I like the concept of a poem inspired by a photograph and presented alongside it. I like a book that is not afraid to show men's penises and discuss them frankly. We are much too averse to men's bodies in this society.

"Beautiful Tendons," the poem that lends its title to the volume, is the longest poem in the book, divided into 13 sections. There is a same-sex relationship at the crux of it. It has a subtle eroticism throughout that is occasionally hard edged and explicit. There are images, actions, and emotions pasted together in a collage, but there is no concern with clarity. I would compare it to a landscape that is shrouded in a fog. One can make out shapes, shadows, and occasionally something explicit and clear will emerge, but it is hard to discern exactly what one is looking at. You get an idea, sometimes acutely expressed, but you can't really penetrate it in any depth. You have to be satisfied with the small fragments, often beautifully phrased, that join together in a flow. ... A few additional favorites of mine from *Beautiful Tendons* include "Anemone," "Song for a Birthday," "The Unobtainable," "A Flower Song," "Blues for Goodbye," and "Instinct."

I would like to call attention to Beam's mastery of poetic technique in his sense of beauty and effect in rhythm and line: the way consonants shape a phrase and give it a pace and a flow. One sees it throughout the volume, but I will illustrate what I mean with one favorite example. Consider this excerpt from "Song for a Birthday" This is one example of many that could be lifted from these poems that illustrate Beam's mastery of the resources of the English language to create subtlety in aesthetic quality. This is a mature writer who has mastered his craft and has considerable breadth in his repertoire. His style is sometimes overly compressed and disconnected for my taste, but there is eroticism, there is subtlety, there is imagination, there are unexpected twists and turns. There is much to be recommended in this high quality volume.

—**Michael Ferguson** in [Journal of Homosexuality](#), Vol. 56, no. 4 (May 2009)

Recommended by the American Library Association Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table for libraries that have a GLBT or modern poetry collection.

—[Blog of The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table](#) (December 19, 2008)

What a fantastic double set of your poems! It is incredibly impressive. But the poems themselves inside each are so juicy and evocative, and daring, going beyond any one dimension or category of consideration — I mean, they are so inclusive and at the same time so accessible! — that you should be thrilled. This is a great accomplishment. At the same time you should be proud, for they are something to pore over and pick up and keep, and as they will be, I am

sure, cherished. It's not something one reads one time. It is something one has to look at over time and through time and find the larger context of a large vision.

—Author **Daphne Athas** on **Gospel Earth** and **The Beautiful Tendons** (email to author, July 2010)

This is awkward, unskilled poetry painted by a hand that would rather design a room with unmatched furniture.

—Music critic **J. Peter Bergman** in [Edge](#) (online gay magazine). [So, he didn't much like it did he?]

Bob Arnold reprints the opening poem, *The Man Poem*, on the Longhouse website as *Woodburners We Recommend*, Spring Coming 2008.

—**Bob Arnold**, Longhouse Booksellers and Publishers

Jeffery Beam never wanted to be “a gay poet.” He didn't want to be an unpublished poet either. But good poetry by a gay man could be a hard sell in the '80s and '90s if you weren't part of the in crowd -- as in “in” New York and other cities where many of Beam's contemporaries were finding success. Now Beam has taken many of his “fugitive” poems, many published in gay journals but not previously in book form and published them in “The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems 1969-2007.” He gave a reading last week at The Internationalist book store. Beam didn't want to leave his native South to make it as a poet. More to the point, he saw value in living as gay man where that might not be easy. “I saw it as a political act,” he said. “I thought some of us needed to stay here.” Now, 38 years after he wrote the oldest poem in “Tendons,” Beam sees a benefit to being excluded from the anthologies. By not fitting in with the urban gay poets who were defining a certain type of gay culture, he says he avoided confining his themes of coming out and political messages that today seem dated. His work was always more about the spiritual, rather than political journey. Even if that journey only took him from Kannapolis to Chapel Hill ... and now to Hillsborough, where he lives with his partner of 28 years, Stanley. “I grew up redneck,” Beam told D.G. Martin on WCHL a few weeks ago. “That didn't mean I could stay in Kannapolis. But I still wanted to stay in the South to demonstrate that we were essentially no different from anyone else, that we had contributions to make, and to demonstrate a life.” “I want to live my life in the same wonderful kind of community I grew up in. I find people in the South are such a delight to be with. And I'm one of them.”

—*Chapel Hill News* editor Mark Schultz meets the poet at a reading and comments on his work in *Jeffery Beam, son of the South* – OrangeChat **Raleigh News and Observer** blog and **Chapel Hill News** (Wednesday, November 19, 2008)

Recommended on Ron Sillimon's blog, and on Christopher Hennessy's *Outside the Lines* blog

Amazon.com "Body Electric pick" from the Body Electric School (San Diego, CA)