

General comments on the work of Jeffery Beam:

CONNECTED: Few people can say they've met Jeffery without telling him a story or hearing one in return. Whether they're students or professors, housekeepers or administrators, no one is beyond his generosity, and Jeffery's network of friends, colleagues, and co-conspirators spans all categories. People seldom avoid being infected with his enthusiasm when he shares his passion for writing, gardening, philosophy, food, and travel. Through his poetry, his service to campus, and his day-to-day dealings with the people he meets, Jeffery is the Library's ambassador to the wider community.

—From the UNC-Chapel Hill University Library **20+ Years of Service "In Honor of Your Service"** booklet, April 2009.

Jeffery S. Beam is a staff employee in the Couch Biology Library of the Academic Affairs Library. Since he began his career as a poet, he has worked tirelessly through readings, workshops, and supporting young writers and poets to show and teach the beauty and excitement of creative endeavors. In words and in actions, he has given his talents to the campus, the citizens of the state of North Carolina and beyond in support of the University's mission. In addition to a prodigious creative output, he has an outstanding history of public service to the campus, the community, and his state.

—Citation for the **2000 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Office of the Provost Award** from the UNC Center for Public Service

Jeffery has an amazing picture on his Facebook home page — a green manicured lawn, two evergreen trees, an ivy covered wall with a sculpted outline of a door, which may be real or not . . . Green is the most common color in the natural world. In the liturgical year it is the color of the season of Pentecost between the day of Pentecost in late spring and the first Sunday of Advent, four Sundays before Christmas. This period of time is also called ordinary time because we spend more days in this season than any other. We live in a world of green. In Jeffery's picture you look at all this green and then realize there is a door, though it is shut you want to walk through it. We see what is before us but we do not see what is beyond. We have hints of what is beyond. From sacred texts we read — Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in (from the Psalms); we read — Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (from Revelation). We are not certain who, in this picture, is the one who can open this door — there is no handle. It is a mystery. Maybe Jeffery can tell us what this means to him.

—**Mary Rocap**, singer, musician, and director of the **Faith in the Arts** series at **St. Matthew's Episcopal Church**, Hillsborough, NC, introduction to Jeffery Beam's reading BEYOND THE GREEN DOOR in the series, October 15, 2015

If someone asks what was were the good things about last Tuesday, I will say, one of the best was I met a wonderful poet who is writing Spirit based poetry! THANKS SO MUCH for all the poems you sent. I can't wait to sit with the poetry and drink in what is wonderful writing. Some days I despair trying to find something to read that is "meaningful". Some days I think Mary Oliver is the sole voice left to us. But no I was wrong. Jeffery Beam is alive and well and living in Hillsborough!

—**Linda Beatrice Brown**, novelist, playwright, poet, and mystic (September 2017 email to Episcopal Campus Ministry, Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill)

Jeffery's unique contribution is his desire to apply his gifts as a writer to a deeper investigation of all of the arts, and to magnify his understandings through collaboration with other artists and the community.

—**Pat Hoffman**, Executive Director, The Scrap Exchange (letter of reference for grant, 1998)

In (Beam's) work the natural world is viewed with a naturalist's acuity, but without the perverse desire of the taxonomist to classify wildlife into cut-and-dry concepts. The natural world retains its otherness in Jeffery's imagination, monsters still run wild through the wilderness, and God may still be sought there. [He is] "beautiful" and nearing a complete physical and spiritual apotheosis that will send a shudder through all of humanity and leave everyone wet, warm, and with the taste of cardamom on their lips.

—Critic **Chad Driscoll** in [Oyster Boy Review](#) (January / March 2000)

Beam has actively engaged not only in writing poetry but in performing it as well before a wide variety of audiences; he reads wonderfully well. He has also designed and printed a series of eye-catching, ear-tickling broadsides featuring

the poems of others, as well as his own work. In addition, he is the poetry editor of the well-received little magazine, *Oyster Boy Review*.

—**Janet Lembke**, natural history writer and classicist (letter of reference for grant, 2000)

Beam's poetry is lyrical and mythic, based in the old stories, coming right out of the elemental wonder of the natural world. What I like most about Jeffery Beam's work is the emotional and imaginative power. He believes in what he does. With vigor and charm he will take his work to people of all ages.

—**Shelby Stephenson**, NC Poet Laureate and editor of **Pembroke Magazine** (letter of reference for grant, 2000)

Chapel Hill Renaissance man, Jeffery Beam ... writing and speaking with his ever intense honesty ... explores the themes of "Southernness," compassion and humility.

—**John Valentine**, bookstore owner, Regulator Bookshop, Durham, in [The Independent Weekly](#)

Over the past decade, Winter Stories has grown into a beloved tradition in the Carolina community. Children of all ages, and a good number of adults, delight each year in the original poetry, inspired storytelling, and joyful music that have come to mark the beginning of the holiday season. I believe it is particularly fitting that Winter Stories is sponsored by and takes place in one of the nation's outstanding research libraries and at one of our great public institutions. Although we in the Library are most accustomed to working with college students, faculty, and visiting researchers, our unparalleled collections and library buildings are open and available to everyone in the community. Winter Stories is just one way that we demonstrate our commitment to public service for learners of all ages. I would especially like to acknowledge the many Library staff members who, year after year, take on Winter Stories as a true labor of love. Jeffery Beam, the program's originator and chief performer, deserves particular thanks for his unflinching enthusiasm and tireless efforts to make each year's event both wonderful and magical.

—**Dr. Joe Hewitt, University Librarian, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, Academic Affairs Library System, in "Winter Stores" Tenth Anniversary Commemorative Booklet "Lullaby of the Farm" by Jeffery Beam (December 2002)

Jeffery is always a joy to work with. A librarian, skilled in the fine arts of poetry presses, botany, and the whole art of love. After putting together from a much longer manuscript titled **Gospel Earth** a small selection of poems for a **Gospel Earth I**, it made sense to draw more from **Gospel Earth II** and get these into the "Origin" series. Easily done, just ask JB. His network of readers is dynamic and devoted, circling from his own North Carolina hutch, as well as poesy pockets in UK and elsewhere. The poems shimmer on a simple one-page foldout, minting a dozen that way, and each poem would be exclusive to a page itself. There's a lot of gimmie and soul in these booklets.

—**Bob Arnold**, publisher of **Longhouse**, quoted from *his Longhouse Bibliography part Three*, 2007.

He is a master of taking students way beyond their prior openness to various verse forms, not to mention his appeal to the seasoned audience for poetry. He deserves encouragement of the first order at every level.

—**Ronald Bayes**, poet, founder of **St. Andrew's Press and Review** (letter of reference for grant, 2000)

The books are full of LIVING CREATURES – I mean both the ones you depict and the poems themselves. The presentation is stunning, of course, should I say definitive? Throughout I'm taken with poems like "Mockingbird" and "Bluebird" and the swallows of "When you stop to rest" in which the TURNS of your language and the turns of Nature are one and the same. Ibex, from your **Bestiary** another example. And **Visions of Dame Kind** is close to my heart, from the subtlety of its title on. "What I Know About Poetry" goes to both your masters, but I think also comes from Marvell – and much of the work elsewhere Herbert, I think. You have made a home in these pages like his Little Gidding. "Mistletoe," "Bluets," "Sweet Fennel" – it is all wonderful. I was taken, too, by your citation from Edith Sitwell, whom I read ages ago (and thought everyone had forgotten) – and how aptly one reviewer said you were working on the plane of myth. I think that comes across very clearly, but also very clear is your gracefulness of execution / lightness of touch. You give us a clue to follow, one which holds all the maze of books together and makes of them a single work. I imagine you must know Ronald Johnson's work very well. The affinities are so clear.

—Poet **John Martone** (letters to author, March and May 2003)

You are our oracle, scholar, and rare dish.

—Novelist, **Allan Gurganus** (postcard to author, May 2003)

Jeffery Beam is unique among contemporary American poets, both for his genuinely bardic voice and his devotion to classical Mediterranean myth. Profoundly influenced by the cadences of Southern gospel music in his early work, his recent poems have grown closer to classical lyric verse.

—Painter **James McGarrell**, Poet-translator **Ann McGarrell** — Bogliasco Fellows (recommendations December 2003)

I think of you as Carolina's own Lorax. It is good to know that we have someone like you on campus.

—**Carolyn Eifland, Vice-Chancellor for Campus Affairs** commenting on Beam's efforts to preserve the historic and heritage landscape of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's campus. (email to author, October 2002)

Thanks for your polleniferous peach-tongue chaplet and spiritbodysongs and dynamite botanically specific-honoring invocation chant! —Poet **Antler** (letter January 2004 in thanks for two chaplets – "Honey and Cooked Grapes", "AlphaBeatSpiritBodySoup" – and broadside – "Invocation")

[Beam's] strongest early influences were from his mother and grandmother who communicated a Celtic belief in divine immanence without the 'strictures and false decencies' that he feels mar the evangelical tradition. At the age of five he saw fairies in a tree and persuaded his mother that she saw them too. Certainly his earliest memories are of a natural world transformed by powerful love, and of his own sense (even in the womb) both of being gay and of being at one with a universe that is benign and creative. But he writes of himself as belonging 'neither to mainstream poetry in general, or mainstream gay poetry.' And in spite of a career of 25 years, Beam writes: 'I've often felt outside of the larger group, just on the edge of things.'

Although he was married for eight years, he has lived with his lover Stanley Finch for twenty-one years in a house between Hillsborough and Chapel Hill called 'Golgonooza at Frog Level': a name that reflects his indebtedness to Blake's sublime imagination on the one hand and his own belief that reality has to be observed with the attention of a frog's eye. Like Whitman, Beam 'embraces multitudes,' not just in the world of the present but the past. ...

Dissatisfied with the boredom of poetry readings, he has mastered the art of poetic performance in which his words become a dancing and singing that he says possesses him in some poems. This is also what he calls the *duende*, an energy that comes from the soles of his feet as much as from his head and mouth. Orality is central to his sense of the poem and occasionally, he says, 'a poem will demand music.' ...

Beam's sense of himself also depends on 'rootedness' in the culture of the south, and of North Carolina in particular. From that he has reached out to embrace Zen, Sufism, The Tao and Veda as extensions of what he already knew from Christianity about the spirit present in the flesh: 'the unblemished song of the world.' as he calls it.

... Beam sees nature with the keen eye of a botanist but (as one critic has said) 'without the perverse desire of the taxonomist to classify.' He writes of wanting to include 'all of the unseenness, the edge of things we don't normally see.' Like Hopkins, Beam's botanical world is full of juice and joy, and the energy in his poems is ejaculatory. His concept of nature also includes the mythological and the strange: what culture has made of nature throughout history. ...

Simplicity for him does not mean banality, either in thought or expression. It means attention strained to the utmost when directed at the natural world: not so much an illumination of it but a seeing of the radiance in it that others do not and singing its orgasmic force. Beam's credo is 'to say / what is between.' ... Beam's poems proceed by indirection: not from a schema already established, but from a process being worked out and reflected in the composition itself. His credo is in his poem (from *The Broken Flower*):

I have never wanted to
write
the perfect poem, only
the im
perfect, as the human is.

And like another mentor, Basil Bunting, he lays the tune on the air.

But diction and craft are also major concerns: 'common words, yes, but rich with collective and individually complex meanings.' ... His compositions are not bloodless perfections, however. ... These preoccupations with

attention and articulation are evident in his earliest poetic collections ... But Beam's poems are about listening too. ... Beam's use of powerful mythological and theological sources did not overpower what one critic called his 'lifting plain speech into sudden eloquence' nor lose what another critic called their 'alchemy': a revel in physical sensation that was synaesthetic. ... Even in another of his fugitive publications ... what appears to be an aberrant surrealism is another instance of his belief in an almost Keatsian 'wise passivity' to what is outside the rational mind. It may owe something to surrealism and something to Beam's early interest in symbolism, but both are for him ways of refusing to limit the range of experience to the banal world of mere reason.... In Beam's work the legendary is also never far away. ... Increasingly his more recent poetry takes its strength from a play with other forms and cultures, or from seeing within them things that we had always wanted to know. ... This ruminative and reflective poetry is much more intellected than his earlier work, but it is not merely febrile. It looks into the darkness and is not abashed. ... More and more in Beam's recent work one hears the songs of other worlds and older traditions. ... But one senses also a greater contentment in the body, and in embodiment generally: a sort of incarnationalism that is both imaginative and physical. This is more than a matter of cleansing the doors of perception; it is a being in the life of the world in all of its swarming various ways, even in the life of the bee.

—**Douglas Chambers**, Professor Emeritus of the Department of English at the University of Toronto, and Senior Visiting Professor at Birkbeck College, University of London, England. (Unpublished critical piece, 2002)

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 **Antler** (letter January 2005)

Jeffery Beam's forte is the natural world; his poems present the wonderful idea that humankind is an intrinsic part of nature rather than an observer. He understands that in the natural world, "Death and Being exchange vows" forever. His poems, coiling and uncoiling, put prickles on the back of my neck. Poet of the week? He should be given a month at the very least.

—**Janet Lembke** (August 2005, Introduction to North Carolina Poet Laureate Kay Byer's "**Poet of the Week**" feature with the **North Carolina Arts Council**)

Recent anthologies ... identify many strong new gay / queer poets of this generation along with others who are beginning to make their mark. Ken Anderson, Jeffery Beam, Mark Bibbins, Regie Cabico, Rafael Campo, Tom Carey, Justin Chin, Jeffrey Conway, Steven Cordova, Mark Doty, Ron Drummond, S. K. Duff, Daniel Hall, Craig Hickman, Scott Hightower, Walter Holland, Matthew Howard, C.K. Jones, Nathan Kernan, Michael Klein, Dean Kostos, Michael Lassell, Joseph Like, Timothy Liu, Richard McCann, John T. Medeiros, Rondo Mieczkowski, Thomas Paul Miller, M. S. Montgomery, Christopher Murray, Jon Nalley, Peter Pereira, Carl Phillips, George Piggford, William Reichard, Lawrence Schimmel, Reginald Shepherd, Winthrop Smith, Dan Stone, Jerl Surratt, G. R. Taylor, Fabian Thomas, Gary Paul Wright, and Gregory Woods are just a few of these writers.

—In **The Calamus Root: A Study of American Gay Poetry Since World War II** by Walter Holland, 1998, The Haworth Press

There are so many paths, Jeffery, but only a few people who are really bending into the wind, in the deepest way, to, beyond all style, seek what style wants to say in its heart. You seem to me to be one of those.

—**David Need**, poet and critic

Have you ever looked at the sky and thought, "The sky probably tastes like cotton candy and mint-chocolate chip ice cream right now"? Maybe not since childhood. North Carolina poet Jeffery Beam nurtures and polishes that brilliant pair of rose-colored glasses. When he speaks with student writers, he shares the revelation he had while watching butterflies: If they were edible, they would most definitely taste like Turkish Delight. This epiphany spawned a magical poem. Likewise, author Diane Ackerman, in her book *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), celebrates all of our senses ...

—Jane Dalton and Lyn Fairchild in **The Compassionate Classroom: Lessons that Nurture Wisdom and Empathy**. Lesson 3: Notice Anything Different — Wonderment — How can I cultivate wonder in the classroom? 2004, Zephyr Press/Chicago Review Press.

Jeffery is a soul-awakener, a boy dryad, an aesthete of beauty and nature. It is easy to feel kindred to him because he wakes up a part of one that often drifts off to sleep.

—Novelist and Young Adult Writer **Marly Youmans**

Dear Jeffery, Thank you so much for visiting us and sharing your work and your wisdom. The students loved your presentation, and they had a few specific things they wanted me to thank you for. The first on the list was, of course, the Turkish delight. They said it was really thoughtful of you to bring that little treat for them to help them experience the poem, and as well they enjoyed that you brought them the take-home poetry packets and that you passed around the books so they could look at the artwork and the poetry during the course of the class. They mentioned that they were very impressed with your sincere and thoughtful answers to their questions, and they felt you were enthusiastic and truthful when you presented your work to them. They applauded you for having the courage to sing (and thought you sang beautifully) and loved your voices for the bee poems. Overall, they were very appreciative of your visit, and they just wanted to make sure you know that. Thanks again,
—Creative Writing teach **Amy Kostrewa, Cedar Ridge High**, Hillsborough, NC (visit to class in 2009, a class which is visited yearly since 2007)

Jeffery Beam's electric pan-amative "mustard seeds".
Poet **Steven Manuel**, on his blog Stray Horn, April 2015.