

Reviews of THE BROKEN FLOWER:

[Hear an interview about *The Broken Flower* with Frank Stasio on *The State of Things* NPR Station WUNC-FM](#)



In *Colony Collapse Disorder* and *The Broken Flower*, we have strong, assured collections from two of North Carolina's most original poetic voices, Keith Flynn and Jeffery Beam. In addition to being fine poets and careful craftsmen, Flynn and Beam are also tireless proponents of the art of poetry and generous advocates for their fellow poets, especially those who reside in North Carolina. ... Though Flynn's and Beam's poetic voices are distinctive and quite dissimilar, their new collections share some intriguing similarities. For one, both men are musicians—they speak often of music; critics, reviewers, and fellow poets reach for words like “singer,” “song,” “blues,” and “gospel” to describe them; and in person, they are just as likely to sing a song as to say it. So the spirit of music informs and inhabits these poems. They are both “regional” poets, in the sense that they continue to live in a specific place (the mountains of Western North Carolina for Flynn, and the Piedmont for Beam) and vigorously enact Wendell Berry's elegant definition of regionalism, “local life aware of itself”, and yet the span of their poetry is global. ... Beam's poems borrow inspiration from Rilke, the French Cathars, and a Japanese woodcut and transport us to France and Italy. ... Finally, both books are artfully and elegantly structured. ... Beam's book contains numerous epigraphs, a “Poem of Preface,” followed by two titled sections, and ends with a witty, autobiographical “Postscript.” Both books are well-made artifacts. ... Beam is in the line of spiritual, visionary poets like Blake and Yeats, yet a final seeming contradiction is that Beam's poetic practice is clearly in the tradition of William Carlos Williams and the later Objectivist and Black Mountain poets. Perhaps, at least in his overall approach, he is most reminiscent of the poet Robert Duncan, who coupled an abiding interest in mysticism, spiritually, and myth with the Objectivist focus on direct presentation of natural things and the poem as object. And lest we forget, even the visionary Blake celebrated the primacy of “minute particulars” in poetry, and Yeats was “this-worldly” enough to become an Irish senator. ... The book's title poem, “The Broken Flower,” ... fits right in to the betweenness of “Credo,” and the celebration of imperfection in “I Have Never Wanted.” The poem's two totems—the broken flower and the solitary bird's feather—are discovered in “The last place we would think / to look // there in the discarded / shattered world.” Discarded,

broken, shattered, isolated, they nevertheless “speak” and can “tell symbols” that “amaze us.” The pome proposes its Emersonian faith, that “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.” Under the speaker’s human, integrative gaze, these two forlorn items are “Rediscovered: / the most perfect flower the most / perfect feather.” And so one see that like Blake and Yeats before him, Beam, too, manages to integrate the spiritual and the visionary with the physical and the commonplace. Thankfully, as the two strong and varied voices of Flynn and Beam indicate, it is a good time for poetry in the Old North State. We need its salve, its irreverence, its balm, and its élan perhaps as never before.

—[The Cruel Radiance of What Is](#) a review by poet, musician, and English professor **Jim Clark** in the *North Carolina Literary Review* online, vol. 74 (2014).

The poems in Jeffery Beam's *The Broken Flower* call out to be shared. They make the reader want to exclaim to anyone nearby, "Here, read this! Relish this image. Savor these memorable lines: *This tree / whose fruit / opens a window / into the earth's old voice.*" The earth's old voice is everywhere in these poems. Like windows opening, Beam's music calls us to come here. Like a tendril of honeysuckle, both delicate and durable, his poems unfold on the page. They bring to their readers, in the sheaf of this beautifully crafted book, nothing less than a gift.

—**Kathryn Stripling Byer**, former NC Poet Laureate and author of *Wildwood Flower*

The oblique poems in *The Broken Flower* (as Emily says: Tell all the Truth but tell it slant) circle around the heart of the matter. Jeffery Beam zones in, searching to decode mysteries to say / what is between. And he discovers such rare moments as *The skink: / electric fellow / listening for the goldfinch / waiting for the ant's / civilized caravans to return.*

—**Jonathan Greene**, editor and Gnomen Press publisher, author of *Gists Orts Shards I, II*

Jeffery Beam's *The Broken Flower* shows him once more to be a master of the precise word. Language cascades down the page with a grace and sense of inevitability that only the true poet can accomplish. Whether focused on a painting or a friend, Beam brings into language a dazzling clarity. He sees the world the way it is.

—**Ed Foster**, publisher and editor of *Talisman*, author of *What He Ought to Know: New and Selected Poems*

Jeffery Beam's newest collection of poems, *The Broken Flower*, invites the reader to enter Beam's world through Smoky Mountain mists parting to reveal the "dearest freshness deep down things". Resisting every attempt to exhaust the crucial work of naming, *The Broken Flower* is the power of words to disrobe, to run and rest, to float on icy streams, to hang sere and healing in hot Appalachian barns. These poems return the reader to a true Eden, one both redeemed and fallen; the only possible Paradise where the first breath could have uttered the first word. *The Broken Flower* is testament and legacy to that breathing word and its lasting generation.

—Poet **Brian Zimmer**, blogger at *Kirigirisu*

A true Southern Gentleman, Jeffrey Beam's quietly moving, spiritual and deeply human poems in *The Broken Flower* succeed in their attempt *To say what is / between.* Whether looking at the world around him or contemplating works of art, Beam's explorations of the connection between man and nature, art and life, body and soul helps us to find beauty, joy, and meaning both within ourselves and *In the discarded / shattered world.* I am grateful for the life-affirming vision of these finely crafted poems.

—**Reginald Harris**, author of *Autogeography* and *10 Tongues*

Jeffery Beam is a master of observation, of slowing down, of reading for pleasure. He brings us anti-chatter as a sort of balm. A fly, with its "green puddle of inner antagonisms"; the ability to wonder of flies if "their soul's wit is as delicate as ours" takes a special mind, a mind capable of acrobatics sorely lacking in the general populace. There was the time I spoke with Jeffery on the phone, his sonorous voice, such a relief to hear that a poet has a poet's voice. If you ever get the chance, call him. Or just dip in and read parts of *The Broken Flower* out loud to yourself: *When notes break from / the red / poppies' purple throats.*

—**Cralan Kelder**, Amsterdam-based ex-pat poet of *Lemon Red* and *Give Some Word*

Beam is not an academic poet. This does not necessarily imply that the poems in his new book, *The Broken Flower*, are the work of a folk artist or a writer whose education is lacking, but it does mean that this poet's writing is not burdened by a self-consciousness that is the by-product of the fear of being out of the current fashion. It also means that Beam is willing to take risks with what he reveals about himself and the way he sees the world...

The dignified—but not formal or elaborate—diction and the emphasis on images in *The Broken Flower* are to be expected from an experienced poet who is an unreformed Objectivist intent on finding the beauty in natural objects and scenes that are small, hidden, and commonplace... This avoidance of the spectacle and focus on the

ordinary are Beam's way of expressing the intuitive spirituality that guides his perception.

The Broken Flower has been in the works since the 1980s, with the majority of the poems written in that decade and the 1990s. It is composed of two parts, "The Way It Happened" with thirty-six poems and "Winter Cedars" with thirty-two more. There is also a poem of introduction titled "Last Born." Not one to dash off poems and forget them, Beam has revisited these over the decades, using them in readings, editing them, committing them to memory, and in some cases singing them. Living with these pieces for years as he matured and honed his skills as a poet has allowed Beam to edit them carefully, and that is evident in the poems' consistent focus, economy of word and image, and fitting endings. I do not mean to imply that Beam wished to keep this book out of print, in fact he included a large selection of the poems from it in his compact disc collection *What We Have Lost: New and Selected Poems 1977-2001*.

The spirituality Beam reveals in *The Broken Flower*, in spite of the references to Christian motifs and the allusions to classical mythology, is most often an unaffected assumption that the natural world is infused with spiritual weight and meaning. There are poems...with surreal settings and images along with a tone of mysticism...He combines a variety of influences into fresh and original voice.

Beam's originality and willingness to push his inhibitions aside makes *The Broken Flower* easy to appreciate and enjoy...Along with *The Fountain* (1992) and *Visions of Dame Kind* (1995) it contains some of the best work of a prolific and tireless poet who always calls readers' attention to beauty and significance in the overlooked corners of the natural world.

—Editor and Librarian **Cy Dillon** in *The Pinyon Review*, Issue no. 2, Autumn 2012.

In this new collection of poetry, Jeffery Beam looks at the world from the inside out. He takes us into nature—to the place between earth and sky and writes of the birds, the fruit, the trees, the snakes, the weather, etc. as we look for infinity with him. He emerges from the shadows and comes into the light, holding out hands as he takes us with him. In seventy poems and sequences he is ours and we are his. Beam has the ability to choose the correct word and then putting words together. He is a true poet in every sense of the word. This is something of an identity search and as Beam finds his, we also find ours.

As he looks at the world, he sees it as it is and accepts it with all of its foibles. He writes of beauty and does so with beauty and reading his poetry is like a give and take—Beam gives and the reader takes and I absolutely love that idea. I found it extremely interesting to see how older themes blend into modern language. "The tree / whose fruit / opens a window / into the earth's old voice". And as that tree opens that window so Beam opens our hearts... "a tree bends. The wind through our branches. Then. That's the special time". There is a sense of communion and coming together to be one with nature and throughout the collection are references to flowers. Using his own senses of grace and style, Beam welcomes us into him and takes us to the world where he resides. As I move into that world, I am jealous because I do not have the ability to always choose just the right word or phrase and here is a man who does with seemingly little effort. Beam is also the master of the beauty of subtlety. "Nearly astonished; / I have been ready / to renounce / all its blessings". He is both the doer and the observer and of the things that I love about reviewing is having the ability to meet people who are at home with their craft and are eager to share. Come into Beam's world and share it. I guarantee you will yourself becoming a better person.

—Gay Jewish activist, writer, and teacher **Amos Lassen** on his blog [Reviews by Amos Lassen](#). December 2012

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.

Critic **Chris Vitiello** in *Indy Week*, Triangle area readings designated an *Indy Pick*, October 25, 2012