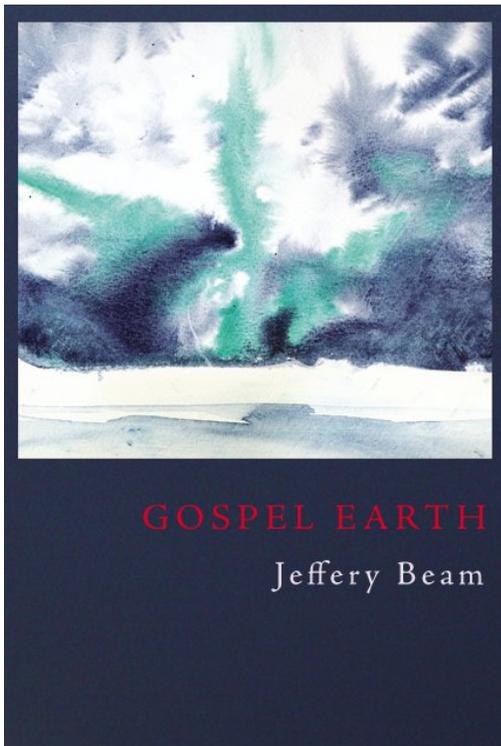


Reviews of *Gospel Earth* (Skysill), *Gospel Earths* (Longhouse), *An Invocation* (Country Valley Press), and *MountSeaEden* (Chester Creek Press)



[Radio interview, The State of Things with Frank Stasio, NPR WUNC-FM 91.5, University of North Carolina, September 16, 2010.](#)

—Jeffery Beam has a lot to say, but he doesn't need many words to express himself. His new book, *Gospel Earth* (Skysill Press/2010), is full of short poems about big ideas. Drawing on his interest in alternative spirituality, Beam forms a collection of poetry he sometimes calls a new Gnostic Gospel.

Nominated for a [SIBA \(Southern Independent Booksellers Award\)](#).

Reading at North Carolina Botanical Garden, October 28, 2010, chosen as **Indy Pick** by *The Independent Weekly* for week of October 27 – November 3, 2010.

From the Cover:

A Fast Short History of the Small Poem in the 20th Century might be like this: Modernism, the luminous fragment: Post-modernism, destabilized morphemes — bringing us to the 21st Century and Jeffery Beam, a mustard seed. To him whose lines trace a world not hinted at, but fleshed out. His poems leave us fortunately told. Carved in reverse on cinnabar or jade, they could be seals. Or legends, clear, crisp stanzas to underline the eye: to open a window in the wall of a page. Mencius

suggests that by nurturing what is small, and letting go of what is large, we welcome, not our loss, but our release. I seed every breeze, sings the dandelion, sings every bright syllable in this Gospel Earth.

— Poet **Thomas Meyer**

So minimal and so lush all at once, their titles become them. Their beauty is about the huge pleasure of omission, and the powerful delicacy of what stays. So what stays can never be sentimental. They are quite sublime. Sacramental. A collection to keep beside a bed. Where they might seep into the sleeping head like pearls. The white page a hand, the poems, tiny snail shells on the palm for scrutiny. Look even closer, they are even more exquisite.

—Artist **Ippy Patterson**

Jeffery Beam hovers around that legendary region of North Carolina that brings out hollerin', poets, real singers, and a certain fine strangeness. The poems come eerily out of gloom, sunlight splash, beast powers and something akin to spirituals.

—Poet and publisher **Bob Arnold**

Beam does not see humankind as separate from all else but rather as an intrinsic part of creation. These poems are numinous, as any gospel should be. Down with dominion! Here's to courting earth's acceptance."

—Naturalist **Janet Lembke**

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 **Marly Youmans**

This book is the product of immense patience and attention to language. [The poems] are meticulous creations. Beam's method combines delicacy with directness. He has a way of making his poems convey a whole thought, a feeling, but as broken-up pieces of a complex idea, recombined in the sort of "dance" William Carlos Williams proclaimed poetry (or a poem) is, or ought to be. It is a poetry of visible economies. But more than even economy ... is that way of giving his poems a deliberate and worldly strangeness. Each is an elegant reaching for subject.

—Poet and critic, **Jim Cory** on *The Fountain*

I have a true empathy for this - simple purity, hymnal catching of delicate manifestations. I think it is high; and I think it is so

American in the best sense.

—Novelist **Daphne Athas** on *Visions of Dame Kind*

Gospel Earth is a lovely, lovely book just to look at from cover to cover, and I am looking forward to the beams of Jeffery Beam to light up my eyes yet one more time. You and your poems are a priceless gift to us all. I bow down in deepest respect to that and to all you have done, old and dear friend.

—Writer Michael Rumaker ([email to author](#), June 2010)

The book is wondrous. Those poems in their home at last, between hard covers, next to our bed, my hand went out last night to lift them up, pages turning, familiar, miraculous. I may never have been happier to see a book in print.

—Artist **Ippy Patterson** ([email to author](#), June 2010)

A treasure to have and hold in one's hand, savor and absorb, its world of lore and language, the voices of others, and then your own, now spare, now rich, inhabiting silence and being. **Gospel Earth** indeed. You rendered those poems marvelously well, and I hope you heard me say so aloud to the assembly ... and also that they need to be heard; they strike the ear with such a range of sound and meaning ... and to my own private delight I heard your great oak whispering in the ear of Dorwos.

—Writer **Barbara Kremen** (letter to author after the inaugural reading, June 2010)

This [book] is ... driven by "the urge to produce the irreducible poem". Many of the poems are one-liners - a form Beam has made a study of. ... Many of the others are short haiku-like poems, but these are no mere syllable-counting metaphors, but poems of depth and a certain mystery: Bees sense crowshadow across dry pavement // I am pilgrim on this vegetable earth. (STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND) I like that. I don't really know why; I just like it. A lot of the poems strike me in that way - "irreducible", I suppose; concentrated, and often needing to be re-read and slowly absorbed by the reader, like a mini-meditation, a Zen Koan. ... Some of this poetry, especially a sequence called "The Green Man", reminds me of Ronald Johnson. But in fact, the influences are wide and fully acknowledged; Beam cites "the spiritual literature and folk traditions of the East and West - Japan, India, China, Korea and Malaysia - the Dao, the I Ching, canny Biblical fragments, the Desert Hermits, Gnosticism, Sufism, Ancient Greek poets and philosophers, the French and Spanish Surrealists, the Symbolists and Decadents, Shape Note Songs, bluegrass and African-American gospel music, women's poetry throughout time, Native American poetry, and the poets of the contemporary small poem movement in America and Britain - particularly..." Beam then goes on to name ninety-five poets across cultures and centuries. The first section of the book, "A Gathering of Voices" is a sequence of short quotes from some of those poets. I like this inclusiveness and sense that the poetry is part of a continuum spanning various human civilizations. I can't do this book justice in a brief blog post, and I hope to review it properly at some point (promises, promises) but for now I'd just say it's recommended.

—Publisher [Alan Baker's](#) blog *Litterbug* (June 29, 2010)

Jeffery Beam's celebration of the "small poem" in his latest collection, **Gospel Earth**, diverts his reader from ambient noise, trims the excess from the natural world. His poems stand out because they whisper, infusing *Gospel Earth* with stillness and secrecy. Beam creates a quiet book in form and tone, filling the page with white space that emphasizes the solitude and fragility of his images. His aim is to observe the "wide silences that do not ache to be filled," and he invites the reader to collude with his minimalist vision. His poems emerge like "Day's eye / brighter / for clouds / breaking round it / (from "Treatise of the Daisy"). They may not be loud, but they are effortlessly luminescent, so it is no coincidence that they so often concentrate on sunlight and nature, brilliantly describing the vicissitudes of daylight, from the brightest rays of midday to the subtle mist of dusk and twilight. But to reduce this collection to a treatise on nature is simplistic and misses the point. Instead, there is a darker, sadder lament tugging at the boundaries of these sparse lines – a sentiment that recognizes an intrinsic pain in detecting the unfiltered, unadulterated beauty of the world in all its rawness. Like Thoreau, Beam maintains a deep understanding of the life of "quiet desperation." There is an extrasensory quality to his poems that enhances his mere word choice. In "To William Carlos Williams," he praises that the older writer's "poems sting with / innocence / gaiety and / passion". This is a feature that Beam strives to bring to **Gospel Earth**, though he also wants his poems, like Williams', to "prick // sweetly," rather than attest to observations. Observation requires a viewer, and this collection is devoid of egoism. The poems do not belong to Beam or a definite speaker; they are shared fragments of the world's quietude. He infuses them with a kind of hushed, nonverbal eloquence that asks to be exhaled rather than read.

—Kimberly Steele in [NewPages](#)

It would be hard to exaggerate the amplitude and "feast of fat things" that is **Gospel Earth**. Not only is the book a rich tapestry of motif and imagery, it is longer than many collections of poems. Its size however, suits the volume in the same way such largesse suited Beam's fellow North Carolinian, writer Thomas Wolfe and his rushing mountain cataract of language. This may sound contradictory, even ironic, for an alleged book of short poems, but the parts come together as a coherent whole in the

same way the various courses and culinary delights Beam describes throughout the book culminate in satiety. These poems comprise a journey – or journeys – through an extraordinarily diverse constellation of sensory experience, gesture, stillness, ecstasy and despair, all under the scrutiny of Beam's macro- and microscopically attentive vision. While the poems are not easy, their distinctive voice and force of language draw the reader quickly into a world familiar yet strange, numinous and irresistibly seductive. **Gospel Earth** opens us to deep earth, clear mountain air, the flora and fauna of Beam's native North Carolina. He is by turns both poetic field guide and shaman and one can never be certain when the shape-shifting will or, perhaps has already, occurred. But North Carolina is only one facet of Beam's complex personal and world geography. He has traveled extensively from Appalachia to France, Italy and Ireland. Interiorizing each place he visits, he takes his readers along with him, instilling in them a growing expectation of secrets to be revealed that only his extraordinary sensitivity to environment and detail seems able to capture. There is a certain gravitas to Beam's vision, the result of a confluence of poetic and metaphysical concerns and encounters absorbed by a lifetime's reading in ancient philosophy, esoterica, world religions and, of course, literature. All of these influences inform a voice so distinctive you can literally hear it on the page. There are echoes of the Black Mountain Poets, the Objectivists and William Carlos Williams; of Emily Dickinson and Rainer Maria Rilke. Nevertheless, there are few false notes or affectations to be found here despite Beam's reverential relationship to his poetic forebears and mentors. They are valued and honored for what they have taught him in the same way he values and honors the trumpet vine and hummingbird, the oak, eel and fern he has come to know intimately from his beloved mountains and various travels. There is much more to **Gospel Earth** than I can enter into here. It is not a book easily surrounded by a review. Acquire a copy and you will find yourself returning to it for continued draughts of Beam's deeply sensuous, unsentimental language, his extraordinary and eclectic interpretation of phenomena, and his open-eyed kinship with a living, multi-layered Earth, passionately and protectively loved.

—Poet Brian Zimmer's [blog](#), *Kirigirisu* (August 14, 2010)

Gospel Earth, carves out a place for itself in the long tradition of nature poetry as a spiritual treatise concerning the natural world. If the earth is a gospel to be read, the poet has scoured its lush verdant verse to translate small poignant moments from the vast world. Everything you are not noticing in the natural world has been captured in this book. At times, **Gospel Earth** sounds like an ancient spiritual text from the Psalms or Rumi. The untitled three-line poem, "Humility nourishes everything/ Do good so you would soothe/ Your face should always be shining" has that sort of didactic, musing quality. Another poem, "Night Gospel," one of the sparest in the book, is just three words long: "Moon bronze cup." These poems operate like haiku, as if the words peel an onion; and your eyes burn with seeing something in a new way. Many of Beam's poems are minimalist and sometimes remain mysterious and elusive because of their pithiness...There are subtle moments of humor in the book, as in another one-line poem, "The Visitation: Moth," where Beam seems to undercut an overused metaphor: "No flame to explain me." In "Geneses: Seventh Day," Beam uses the voice of the weather forecaster, albeit a rather poetic one: "Cool very clear clammy still but sun-quiet vacancies surrounding." These playful moments crop up among the serious. Alongside titles that make an overture toward religious tradition, such as "Testimony" or "Resurrection," we have "The Book of Nuthatch," a poem that embodies the concept of a gospel of the earth. The full poem is as follows: "With a flick of/ sunflower seed shell/ a cut—/ a thrust—/ explaining/ itself to/ sun." The way a seed explains emphasizes the language that is used by natural things, recounted by Beam's gospel. Not all the poems in the collection are quite so minimalist. "The Cook's Song," after MFK Fisher, is one homage of many to be found in the book: "With the wolf at the door./ Feast. Make the shared chop/ the best. Make/ the mind miraculously/ cunning. Make the toast. butter brown. " Playing off Fisher's famous work "Consider the Oyster," the poem ends delightfully: "Consider the onion. Consider the olive. Consider bullfrogs barking in the pond." That last line, the most playful of all, may seem to invite us to consider eating frog legs for dinner but also has the effect of pulling us out of the flavors of nature, inviting the reader to consider the wide natural world beyond the dinner table, the sounds beyond the taste. In a world often lived inside plaster and concrete, Beam's poems invite us to look outward to nature and then inward to the self.

—Jaimee Hills, in [The Independent Weekly](#), October 20, 2010, v. 7 no. 42

I've (naively) always (foolishly) been (trigger-happy) suspicious (dishonest) of the bucolic. It's been so nice to have my cynicism flake off, blow by blow, poem by poem. and the breath of your poems is so...nice. Whispers and wingflaps, a single note hummed down a reed.

—Poet Zack Arrington (email to author, June 2010)

Gospel Earth really is an achievement and one of the best collections I've seen in a while.

—Poet and publisher, Mark Kuniya, of Country Valley Press (email to author, July 2010)

The poems themselves are so compact and end-finito-there that it is a miracle anybody can review them. What is there to say after having one's head hit with gold and silver? Because it inspires a review only in like vein. Which would be fruitless and insane. Reviewers are not poets. If I were reviewing them, which I would never have the daring to do (derring-do?) I could

only say There is there there. Or: There is. There is. There!
—Novelist, memoirist, **Daphne Athas** (email to author, October 2010)

On Jeff Beam's **Gospel Earth**

he's taken by the way
of poetry and takes us
gently with him.

(a true southern gentle man)

—Poet and publisher **Scott Watson**, IN-TO-IT-INGS posting (July 2010)

The density of so many clusters is most rewarding, and we epithetians rarely get that sort of chance!

—Poet / publisher **Simon Cutts** (postcard to author, August 2010)

I like to pick **Gospel Earth** up and to read a little. And then I like to pick it up again and read a little something else. It has been a large part of my landscape this summer. The incidental quality of the detail stays with me.

—Poet / publisher/artist **Erica Van Horn** (postcard to author, August 2010)

Beautiful, beautiful, Good News for these times — I cannot think of a better book for all of us! It is a great work of synthesis, as you intend, and as organic as you intend.

—Poet John Martone (email to author, July 2010)

There are poems here of extraordinary hush and beauty. I particularly like the ones in which arrangement and line-breaks break the syntax into another shape or made syntax strange. This opened out feelings or space within which to feel. The relationship between the force that made those separations or estrangements was not always equal to lyric flourishes, but I did not mind this, or rather, would not want this worked out, as it seemed to me that this unevenness was in its own way a rhythm of attention and grief / witness that was true. We are, alas, not completely constant in love. There are so many paths, 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. [Jeffery Beam] seems to me to be one of those.

—Poet **David Need**

You know the earth's gospel, coming to your own — the way you do in **Gospel Earth!** You make me feel afloat.

—Poet **Shelby Stephenson**, postcard to author (July 2010)

Believe me, we never saw a copy like this until this arrived. Held dear. I don't speak stupid when I say it's a book I will read until my dying day (how dramatic) but that good and that drop-in-able. The poems ask for us.

—**Bob Arnold**, Longhouse Booksellers and Publishers (email to author, July 2010, upon receipt of dedication copy)

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)

Your beautiful book which has been besides my bed for moments of late night delight ever since it arrived. Your poems are so effortlessly meticulous that they seem to fall like raindrops into the ocean of consciousness, so I enjoy the ripples as much as the drop itself.

—Author and mystic, **Tim Freke** (email to author, July 2010)

Your poems (are) like fresh air blowing from between the clouds that so often cover us. I especially love the lines of "What is the Sound." They touch a chord that is rarely heard, something both broken and whole.—Sufi mystic, **Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee** (letter to author, July 2010)

Thank you for **Gospel Earth** and the spare, ringing poems.

—**W. S. Merwin** (card to author, July 2010)

[Gospel Earth] reveals a keen eye for the natural world, something that will always gain my immediate attention. I am also drawn by what appears to be a strong influence on your work by both Black Mountain and Objectivist schools (Larry Eigner being a particular favorite of mine). Of course Cid Corman won my heart long ago but can be placed in no school despite his support and promotion of writers from both of the above. At page 100, the one word that rises to describe your work is "lush". I find myself being fed.

—Poet **Brian Zimmer** (email to author, August 2010)

I can hardly read it without being completely overcome. *Holy Well. Resurrection. Minotaur Exposed.* Etc. All such (powerful?) Real bursts. Really a joy. Joy is a good word. Light . Brilliant. **Gospel Earth** has a good home here. Where it will be read. Heard. And read again.

—NC Poet **Ted Pope** (letter to author, August 2010)

Your work is such a rich corpus ... I don't think that there is a better poet writing in English, anywhere.

—**NC Poet Ron Bayes** (email to author, October 2010)

"For the next few days I will be featuring a short poem from Jeffery Beam's beautiful new book **GOSPEL EARTH**, published by Skysill Press.

—NC Poet, former NC Poet Laureate, **Kay Byer's** blog *Here, Where I Am*

Excerpt from poem "Resurrection" ... "What late fire dragons"

—featured on **Steven Moore's** [Tai Chi Heartwork](#) blog September 8, 2010

Excerpt from poem "Snow Gloom" ... "All the beauty"

—featured on **Steven Moore's** [Tai Chi Heartwork](#) blog September 10, 2010

Apologies for pruning your poem down to that quatrain - I always feel guilty when I do that. But I love the way "What late fire-dragons / fume from my body" is about spirit, and then the next two lines are with spirit - spirit manifests between those lines. Again, thank you for the inspiration of your work - your dedication to the task as well as the product of that dedication. As Olson said, poets are the only real pedagogues left.

—Steven Moore's **Tai Chi Heartwork**, email (September 2010)

Beam proves that there is indeed beauty in the written word and whenever I need a lift, I read one of his poems. The poems in **Gospel Earth** bring us the world of nature and each and every poem is something of beauty. The book is a collection of short poems with a large message and as you read the poems come together as we embark a journey of the senses that also incorporates bliss and despair and gesture and silence. The language stuns the reader and seduces him to go deeper into his thoughts as he reads. The collection is set on Beam's home turf of North Carolina and he uses it as a home base as well as a jumping off place. As we journey we are taken into the mind of the poet to a degree and even more deeply into our own minds. While there are a few longer pieces here, the book consists of short poems in almost all of their forms. Beam is esoteric and metaphysical and we feel what influenced him to write the poems here. We are made aware of which poets influenced his writing (Rilke, Dickenson, William Carlos Williams, the Objectivists, etc) but they are all Jeffrey Beam who shares with us his intimacy with nature. Because there is so much in **Gospel Earth** it is a difficult book to write about and review. Once you begin to read it you will totally understand what I say here.

—Gay Jewish activist, writer, and teacher [Amos Lassen](#) on his blog, originally posted in Eureka Pride's *Literary Pride* reading group (September 2010) and on Amazon

Jeffery Beam's rich and varied literary contributions have been recognized here before, but his recent reading at the UNC Botanical garden was a found treasure. He was surrounded by friends and presented not only botanical poems from his latest book, *Gospel Earth*, but sang, reminiscenced, and read favorite passages from the poets who have influenced him. Jeffery's wonderful voice, his energy, and his exuberant love for natural beauty made his reading a meditation and a spiritual sharing.

Gospel Earth ... begins with a plentitude of short quotes, almost all gemstones of thought from many different sources. Just as he shared his influences in the reading, his book says up front: here I stand, the earth my image, love my fuel, all the beauty I have been given is part of me. Those are my words and show Jeffery's effect on one: spiritual and mindful.

Gospel Earth moves from the quotes to extremely short responses to images, many one line or even two or three words. The literary devices are almost invisible behind the strong Zen and monastic distillations of pure meaning. The natural images shine for themselves in Jeffery's deft and delicate frames. The Botanical Garden says **Gospel Earth** is "a big book of little poems, [it] has already received acclaim for its transcendent, lush beauty; its minimal sacrament; and its simplicity and

physicality. Described by the poet as a work intended to “invigorate the startling propulsion of haiku’s accessible simplicity and minimalism, while creating a more active canvas.” The book does contain larger pieces, including a prose meditation on birding dedicated to Jonathan Williams (more about him below). One of my favorite pieces is a poem with notes that constitute an essay called “The Green Man’s Man.” The poem finds Jeffery immersed in Nature but always open to the philosophical notes in her song:” I open Nature’s book/finding:/The more I know/The less I know.” The notes were written specifically for a different Botanical Garden event, and delve into the mythological image of the Green man. Jeffery tells us The Green Man is not separate from us, he is our source, emphasizing and celebrating the positive creative laws of Nature, the native intelligence that shepherds and protects this world, and the ecological rightness that guides us. Jeffery continues to enact and support the spirit of Black Mountain College in many ways and I hope to learn more of his scholarship regarding Jonathan Williams. He has presented numerous times about him, and is working on a bibliography. He has also shared manuscripts and links that make it clear he is a leading authority on the man’s life and significance.

—**John Dancy-Jones** in his blog [Raleigh Rambles](#) (December 26, 2010)

Novelist Marly Youmans featured twelve poems from, and quotes from reviews of **Gospel Earth** on her blog (Youmans has featured my work a number of times before), [The Palace at 2 AM](#) with this comment: Jeffery Beam is a poet worth knowing; I recommend this book and hope you will think about ordering it through your favorite bookshop.

Ron Silliman on his blog provided a link to the *New Pages* review, and later mentioned the book in a discussion about his [reading habits](#).

Jeffrey’s poems are gorgeous and so wise. He seems to be at the heart of essence so effortlessly.

—Poet **Philip Lee Williams** (posted to Marly Youman’s blog)

Putting a very short poem on a page by itself creates a certain risk for a poet. If the reader connects with the image or emotion of the poem, the white space is an invitation to savor the reading and let the words resound longer than if there is more on the page. If, on the other hand, the poem does not engage the reader, the empty paper is like the silence after an awkward remark at an intimate dinner. Following the success of his recent book **The Beautiful Tendons**, poet Jeffery Beam takes this risk something like one hundred and fifty times in his beautifully produced new volume, **Gospel Earth**; and he gives readers many opportunities to stop and let a small poem work.

The book, in fact, is beautifully printed, fitted with a striking cover, and produced with plenty of room for interesting additions to the body of short poems. These extras include a passionate prose introduction titled “Illuminations,” six pages of quotations gathered by the author over many years of careful reading, a prose piece and a longer poem near the middle of the book in a section titled “Green Man,” and a very fine introductory poem, “An Invocation.” In a collection of unusual and well-crafted small poems, I actually found this longer piece to be one of the most successful. Its call-and-response structure and persistent rhythm help bring the images to life, as in this stanza.

That is not to say that the shorter poems should be overlooked. They are good enough that I found myself pausing after reading each one, rereading and trying to enter the world they create in such a few words.

The book is divided into six distinct sections, and the variety makes the collection much more than a group of short poems. The section titled “Travels” is also subdivided into groups of poems focused on the Appalachian Mountains, France, Tidewater North Carolina, Italy, and Ireland, allowing the reader to hear the same voice as it encounters very different settings. So, there is quite a bit of variety in *Gospel Earth*, but Beam returns to the short poem throughout.

—Librarian **Cy Dillon** in [Virginia Libraries](#), vol. 56 no. 4 (October/November/December, 2010)

“Even [Beam’s] brief phrases resonate: like haiku, the sharp image propels one to muse upon meaning(s). Beam’s poems frequently depend on images, fresh and often dazzling ... These poems read like riddles or koans. In Beam’s poetry, whether meaning rings clear or eludes us, unmistakable is the “being,” the celebrating of life and especially the natural world. Almost every poem contains at least one ringing image ... Beam’s central stance is that of celebration, but he is not hesitant to deal with the difficulties of life. In an interview with Kevin Bezner, he discusses his willingness “To accept the dark side, or whatever you find under the stone, or hidden in the moss. I don’t think any of that denies the importance of light. Or the energy of light. Or what some people see as positive energy. I see this dark energy as very positive too. It’s a demand that we accept all those things we don’t want to look at, or see, or forget to look at. The important thing is to look. As human beings, we are animals who are part of the natural world. The natural world is a good schoolhouse for learning to see. I just happen to want to stay in the schoolhouse.” And in *Gospel Earth*, Beam brings us – as earnestly perceptive companions – into that schoolhouse with him.

—Poet **Sally Buckner** in *North Carolina Literary Review*, no. 20 (2011)

This is a sprawling book, an unruly book, and as I read I vacillate wildly between admiration and impatience. Perhaps that’s fine. Some of my favorite prose works are similarly undisciplined: Zhuangzi, Moby Dick, Gargantua and Pantagruel, and lord

knows the Bible. Not bad company! The section called "MountSeaEden" was my favorite. None of the poems in this section have titles at all (except in the Table of Contents — an interesting compromise), and we're told they originated from "Traversing the Healy Pass, Caha Mountains, Beara Peninsula, Ireland" with two companions in Autumn 2006. They seem appropriately light and free, and their cumulative effect lends power to the individual parts, where mountain and sea are blended to dizzying effect. I got it as a review copy, but if I didn't own it and I saw it in a bookstore, I would probably buy it, because I do love micropoetry and there's a lot here to admire and learn from. Beam clearly understands how brevity can make a piece more suggestive and powerful.

—Poet and blogger **Dave Bonta** on his blog [Via Negativa](#) (April 4, 2011)

Like Dickinson, Beam observes and celebrates the wonders of the natural world, helping us see them with fresh eyes that can recognize their sacredness. There's more craft to these tiny poems than some readers might immediately credit. Reading them integrated into this review is probably much like studying an art book's photos of Jackson Pollock's enormous drip canvases: you get only part of the effect. Though *Gospel Earth* includes many poems of striking brevity, several walk down the page a bit. Beam looks and listens for nature's teachings, which underscore his appreciation of harmony but also increase his sense of mystery. It's an appealing posture, humility without surrender — the admission that enlightenment heightens awareness of one's own ignorance, of the fact that nature has something new to teach us.

—Poet, editor, and critic **Robert West** in *Asheville Poetry Review*, vol. 18 no. 1, issue 21 (2011)

Thanks for *Gospel Earth*, beautiful! Emerson wrote "Each word was once a poem." *Gospel Earth* resonates with that breakthrough. ... I love the title *Gospel Earth* vs Gospel Scared Text that's only 2000 years old, or Gospel Nerve Gas and Nuclear Bombs, or Gospel Oil Spill, or Gospel Cut-Throat Capitalism, or Gospel Unjust War, or Gospel Jihad-ville, or Gospel CEO Bonuses with taxpayer \$, or Gospel Global Warming en Aeturnum. I love how your love of plants, creatures, weather, landscape auras your homoerotic tenderness universe and passion. A total lover of wild nature balancing and complementing a lover of cosmic fellows worthy of love!

—Poet **Antler** (letter to author, December 7, 2010)

[Lena Vanelander](#) gave 5 of 5 stars to *Gospel Earth* on *Good Reads* (April 12, 2001), stating " If you love short poetry, captivating ... this book is a must read!"

Reviews of GOSPEL EARTH (online chapbook, and two chaplets Gospel Earth and Gospel Earth II) from Longhouse – this is the first section of the subsequently published book Gospel Earth:

I am knocked out by their plain beauty.

—Poet and translator **Ann McGarrell**

You have my favourite book by Jeffery Beam.

—English poet **David Preece**

Gospel Earth is thrilling and choice, and they work their spell so visually, both in imagery and in layouts that strike me as equivalent to Lee Wiley's phrasing of jazz standards.

—Painter **James McGarrell**

I'm writing to say that I read **Gospel Earth** and greatly enjoyed it, the careful syllabic construction of the lines, like chewing on good fruit, a large peach, like that, not sure I can describe it, but the lines are gnarled in a good way, designed to get the maximum bang from each syllable. ... The whole a bit of a macro of the micro, in the sense that the poems sit a bit together one by one, as does the whole piece, shifting downwards and across.

—Dutch poet **Cralan Kelder**, editor *Versal*

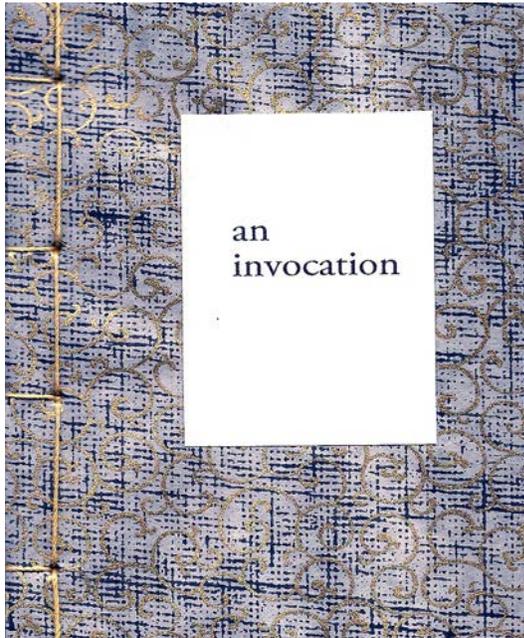
Jeffery Beam has shared a myriad of his publications with us. He hovers around that legendary region of North Carolina that brings out hollerin', poets, real singers, and a certain fine strangeness. He makes his living in the library trade and edits an excellent journal called *Oyster Boy*. When he wrote and described to me his new piece of work titled *Gospel Earth* the title alone had me ask to see it all, even though I knew it would be much too large for us to publish. The poems came eerily out of gloom, sunlight splash, beast powers and something akin to spirituals. It got real messy on my hands and in my head and thoroughly unavoidable so we went and printed it all and posted it on-line. Share the powers. I could have edited it down to a two sleeve foldout but I went even more dangerously thin and chose a one sleeve hollowing booklet. Less is more unless you want it all. - **Bob Arnold**, Longhouse Booksellers and Publishers [Publisher of the online version of section one of this

edition]

Gospel Earth is transcendent.

—**Andrew Hughes**, Editor *Frame*

Reviews of AN INVOCATION (Country Valley Press) – later introductory poem to Gospel Earth continue:



Your first line is exquisite – it all flows from there. I thought of Dylan Thomas' "From loves first fever to her plague" but I just re-read the DT and like your poem so much more. It offers just the right balance of the tactile and the abstract, the sensuous and the ideal. And speaking of love, I love the smell of "magnolia, camellia, gardenia" – a richness beyond sweet. Two favorite lines "From mystery's bedroom / love's tortuous wisdom" and "From tears' shivering sorrow / joy reshaping."
—Poet and critic, **Jim Cory** (postcard to author, July 2009)

[*An*] *Invocation* is a remarkable structure, and really deals with that Japanese sewn page. I love the way it reads across, the weight of the lines and their extensions.

—Poet and publisher, **Simon Cutts** (postcard to author, August 2009)

Got me a copy of *An Invocation* which is a splendid thing in the hand and in the mind. ... It's an advantage to the text of *An Invocation* to have more than a single (linear) reading. In fact the page by page, strikes me, is the reader's first response. anyway, count me among them for whom the text is a field not a grid.

—Poet **Thomas Meyer** (two emails to the author in early August 2009)

What big pleasure packed on every page of your beautifully made little booklet *An Invocation*, dear Jeffery Beam of Light, a lovely song made of just-right words and just-right music from your just-right ear and tongue. Most glad you're here to hear, old friend. Keep on singing! Big love and gratitude.

—Writer **Michael Rumaker** (email to author, August 2009)

That hidden voice you felt but hadn't heard, I think you had been moving toward it all along. It is the strong wine of reduction; silence surrounds it.

—Writer **Barbara Kremen** (email to author, November 2009)

So minimal and so lush all at once, their titles become them. Their beauty is about the huge pleasure of omission, and the powerful delicacy of what stays. So what stays can never be sentimental. They are quite sublime. Sacramental. A collection to keep beside a bed. Where they might seep into the sleeping head like pearls. Love this ratio now become your insignia. The white page a hand, the poems, tiny snail shells on the palm for scrutiny. Look even closer, they are even more exquisite.

—Artist **Ippy Patterson** (also used for blurb for **Gospel Earth**)

[Jeffery Beam is] a pilgrim on this vegetable earth and in its feathered air. [He is] a thrush in a tree, [he] wrestles a worm, detonates the woods. [He is] the sun. I think [these poems are] numinous, as any gospel should be. [The] fractured freestyle encapsulates the random serendipities of the natural world. I am thrilled to see it inhabited by many birds as well as plants and insects. [He's] right: "Nature's intention flight of birds." What I love most is the poems' connectedness to their subjects. [Jeffery Beam does] not see humankind as separate from all else but rather as an intrinsic part of creation sharing equally with moth, acanthus leaf, black gum, and nuthatch. Down with dominion! Here's to courting earth's acceptance.

—Naturalist, classicist, essayist **Janet Lemke** (also used for blurb for **Gospel Earth**)

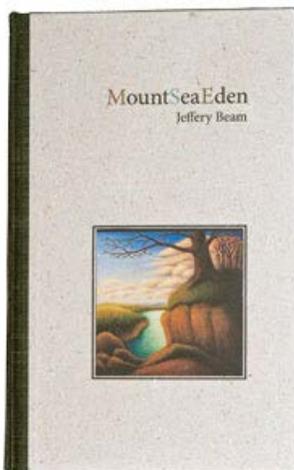
An Invocation is a splendid thing in the hand and in the mind. ... It's an advantage to the text to have more than a single (linear) reading. In fact the page by page, strikes me, is the reader's first response. anyway, count me among them for whom the text is a field not a grid.

—Poet **Thomas Meyer** (on the limited edition chapbook version of **An Invocation**)

I think it amazing that the book's structure becomes a part of the poem, and it really works well in Country Valley's little book. Here, the gutter is not so large, and the page size and design naturally limits the number of lines per page. The eye and mind go horizontally across the page, does a little jump over the gutter, and then take in the concluding phrase for each line. The poem's also included – in fact it opens – Beam's **Gospel Earth** (Skyskill Press, 2010), and for me it doesn't work as well there because the line-pauses are set up typographically on the page, and up to a half-dozen quatrains are presented on each of the three pages on which the poem's presented. But of course here in this post you're going to see an excerpt from the poem without a gutter. This then provides a clear example of how the physical book, the small Country Valley Press edition, trumps any e-reader or digital display of the poetry. The gutter in the book makes the pause in each line between the call and response real, a physical fact, a space in which one can feel that the poem's action – and your mind a readers – take a small leap before continuing. It makes for a far more memorable experience than the flat screen. Although sometimes Beam trades in more general terms, most of the paired phrases in an invocation include natural details similar to those quoted above. All the details seem very particular to the North Carolina area where Beam was born, raised and has long-lived. The relationships between the call and the across the page-gutter response are sometimes complementary, sometimes supplemental, and at other times the juxtapositions just are, with the connection being more or less hidden (and per Heraclitus, thereby stronger). This Country Valley edition is an excellent poem of a place, neatly conceived, well written, and presented in a most beautiful Corman-style book, taking full advantage of the little book's form.

—"Put these in your Kindle...." **Steve Fama** in his blog [the glade of theoric ornithic hermetica](#) (August 28, 2010)

Reviews of GOSPEL EARTH (with specific reviews of MountSeaEden limited letter press edition from Chester Creek Press:



MountSeaEden, is, admittedly, a bit too stripped-back for this reviewer's tastes but I can appreciate its appeal as a sequence of snapshots that might fittingly accompany a pleasant stroll in the countryside. However, its publication as a limited edition handset, handmade, bound in quarter cloth with a cover illustration from a painting by Laura Von Rosk would seem to rule this out, rendering it more coffee table art than pocket edition material but, for all that, still a celebration of something great and beautiful within.
—Jillian Robinson in [Gloom Cupboard](#) (May 2012)

Wonderful gray-green black and white poems. As lush as an ocean, as spare as a peak.
—Poet **Thomas Meyer**

Love this ratio now become your insignia. The white page a hand, the poems, tiny snail shells on the palm for scrutiny.
Look even closer, they are even more exquisite.
—Artist and writer **Ippy Patterson**