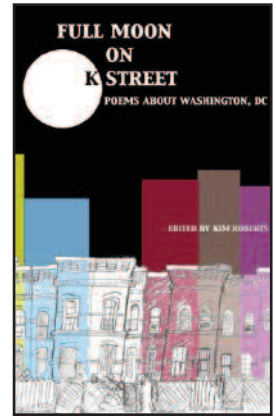


FULL MOON ON K STREET: POEMS ABOUT WASHINGTON, DC

Q&A WITH EDITOR KIM ROBERTS

BY PLAN B PRESS PUBLISHER STEVEN ALLEN MAY



PBP: *What prompted you to start Beltway Poetry Quarterly online magazine?*

KR: It was the idea of my friend Kathy Keler. Kathy is a painter and graphic designer, and she started a website called "washingtonart" to showcase other area visual artists. She thought it would be a great idea to pair this with some poems, and--after convincing me, since I initially took some convincing--Kathy taught me some basics of html, and designed the logo and overall look of the journal. I can't believe that it will be ten years old this coming January! The journal has taught me so much, and introduced me to so many poets.

PBP: *The anthology, Full Moon on K Street, has evolved from a celebration of Beltway Magazine to a more sweeping look at the city's poetry over the past 50 years. How did that happen?*

KR: The anthology is an overlapping of my several obsessions: poetry, of course, but also literary history, and the built environment. I love cities--their architecture, their grid, the way large groups of people use the space--and I love DC especially. I've looked at a lot of other anthologies, and nothing like this exists--a portrait of the city from 1950 to the present, and the places within the city that have meant something special to these authors.

PBP: *What types of obstacles have you had to deal with in preparing the anthology? What has been most frustrating and most rewarding in the effort?*

KR: Compiling an anthology is much harder than I imagined! There were lots of authors I knew I wanted to include, and I looked back over their work, and was surprised to see that many never wrote poems set in DC. That includes such authors as wide ranging as Larry Neal, Archibald MacLeish, Owen Dodson, and Anthony Hecht. There were other authors, such as Dierdra Baldwin, Gloria Oden, and Haki Madhubuti who did not respond to my request for poems. It would have been lovely to have included all of them.

But there were lots of wonderful coups as well. I spoke to the next-of-kin of many authors who have passed away who were enthusiastic about the project. Some, like Ed Cox's family, were thrilled to be reminded that their loved ones are still read and loved by the larger literary community. I am so grateful to them (as well as the families of Hilary Tham, Ann Darr, Betty Parry, and others) for the warm responses they gave.

I was also gratified by the poets who--like Myra Sklarew--decided to write poems specifically for this anthology. And I was pleased to be able to track down so many authors who once lived in DC and have since moved away, such as Michael Lally, Gray Jacobik, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Sharan Strange.

There are also poets included who I think should be better known to readers. I was able to get permission to reprint a poem by Essex Hemphill, the pioneering African-American gay rights activist whose poetry is a revelation, but whose work was long kept out of circulation by family members wanting to preserve their privacy. There are poems by Percy Johnston, a leader of the Howard Poets of the 1970s, and Eugene McCarthy, best remembered as a Senator and five-time Presidential candidate. Their poems, different as they are, show great humor and an deep engagement with the world around them. Jose Emilio Pacheco, little known here, is widely considered Mexico's greatest living poet. He taught at the University of Maryland for one semester a year for many years, and his poem about Sligo Creek is a terrific addition to the book. And Gaston Neal, who published so little during his lifetime but was a mentor to so many, is included with a tribute poem to Sterling Brown.



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What was hardest was keeping the anthology restricted to only 100 poems. (Actually, I overshot the mark slightly; there are 101.) I could easily--very easily!--have included twice that number. There are many, many authors I regret leaving out. But there was a lot I was trying to balance in this collection: I wanted each decade from the 1950s to the present to be well represented. I wanted to include poems about the widest range of the city's geography (not just poems about the monuments and Capitol Hill). I wanted to include authors who are well known next to authors who would be new discoveries for most readers. Overall, I am very exciting with the mix I was able to bring together.

PBP: *Is there a quote that you live by?*

KR: I've long loved this one, from President John F. Kennedy--which I made *Beltway Poetry Quarterly's* motto: "When politics corrupts, poetry cleanses."

I will give you the fuller quote here. Kennedy wrote: "When power leads a man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment."



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