

Heather Woods

Beyond our mortal? —can I speak my verse

Patiently unknown

struggle for spatiality

climbing the roof

put my eggs in your tomb

describe the starry blue

a nostalgic sameness

directs the divine

dimple grey

we were surrounded by

title: *Aurora Leigh*, book 5 verse 24.

The lion in me felt the keeper's voice

Her head takes shape
Her shape shakes head

Her thoughts gain weight
Holes overfed:

I was along the path looking for it and found you, not quite what I was stumbling
towards—an infinite blue yes in her pocket! You know, the sort of thing you make a
gelatin print of—A NEUTRAL NEURAL smile—flat-line, like the heart's gone out,
explode red spring pumping through arteries, our trees open and close themselves as
spring takes her first lick at it—

Off of me!

Or plant a word in my
opening

title: *Aurora Leigh*, book 2 verse 561.

To throne such feet as yours, my prophetess,

Wd. require raffia tinged with gold

and much bending to

see beyond

I presented my flesh to you

'But all in blots and fragments'

blood drips

in the singing brook

fish billow glee

to meet edges of water and air

'—Echo answers *where*.'

meet her at the edges of self

‘—echo answers *why*.’

‘from inner to outer’

‘hot and hot.’

‘the hand of the soul shakes.’

title: *Aurora Leigh*, book 5 verse 942.

quotes: EBB’s letters.

Note:

AURORA, OH-ROAR-AH, ‘the dark felt beautiful’, is a modern poetic response to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Victorian epic, *Aurora Leigh*. The title of each poem is a line from *Aurora Leigh*. Borrowing from *Aurora Leigh* was at first a simple spark that led to an incantation of spirit. My own poetics typically surge from contemporary poetry that moves pictorially on the page, such as the sweeping poetry of Barbara Guest. I was shocked to have such a vibrant modern encounter with this very Victorian text. EBB lamented that she had very few literary ‘grandmothers’ whom she could turn to for inspiration and advice. *Aurora Leigh* is perhaps the first-born feminist *Kuntslerroman*: the story of a young woman poet seeking her poetic place (and a place for her poetics) in the world. The edition of *Aurora Leigh* that I referenced was the Norton Critical Edition

edited by Margaret Reynolds. Allusions from *Elizabeth Barrett Browning, The Life and Loves of a Poet*, by Margaret Forster.

A San Francisco Bay Area native, **Heather Woods** received her BA from Kenyon College and her MFA from the University of San Francisco. At Kenyon, Heather founded *Persimmons*, a literary magazine that is still flourishing today, and worked for four years on *The Kenyon Review*. Heather's poems have appeared in *Switchback* and are forthcoming in *Freehand*, and a collaborative article appears in *Jacket*. With Carla Hall Belmonte, Heather is translating one of Eugene Guillevic's last works, *Le Chant*.