

## The Yews by Nancy Charley



*Two yews who stand on sacred ground  
with branches spread in covering  
are rooted in the ancient leys.*

*Though poisonous at every touch  
they're loyal to their chosen ones  
whose forms are alchemised in wood.*

*For two millennia the older  
has grown into a fat-lipped ogre  
with rugged brow, tufted whiskers,*

*and eyes that stare across the downs.*

*A wide-mouthed mummer who welcomes, warns  
each fading dusk, each rising dawn.*

*The younger through her thousand years  
has gangly grown with bended boughs.*

*She has become an aged crone*

*with changeling suckled at her teat  
and others nestled in her lap,  
strange-jointed bones found in her limbs.*

*Their green frond leaves seem cloth or hair,  
and new twigs shoot in verticals,  
tutelary tangles around the old.*

*These chaperones have dwelt through days  
of feast and famine, plague and war.*

*Their only fears are lightning, fire,*

*and men who many yews have hewn  
for cabinets and archers' bows.*

*But these endure as guardians  
of well-worn paths and travelling souls.*