

The Copper Beech

RITA DOVE

Aristocrat among patriarchs, this
noble mutation is the best
specimen of Rococo

in the park of the castle
at Erpenberg.
The widely-traveled Baroness

returned
from a South American expedition
with any number of plants and a few

horticultural innovations.
This trailing beech became Erpenberg's
tree of grief, their

melancholy individualist,
the park philosopher.
Eight meters above lawn

the tousled crown
rises, her many plaited branches falling
like green water

earthwards, a cascade of leaves.
The aesthetic principles
of the period: branches

pruned late to heal
into knots, proud flesh ascending
the trunk:
living architecture.

About the author

Rita Dove served as US Poet Laureate from 1993–1995. Winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in poetry and the 2023 honorary National Book Award, she also received the 1996 National Humanities Medal from President Clinton and the 2011 National Medal of Arts from President Obama. Other recent honors are the 2021 Gold Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, where she currently serves as vice president for literature, a 2022 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize from the Poetry Foundation and both the 2019 Wallace Stevens Award and the 2024 Leadership Award from the Academy of American Poets. Among her numerous books are *Thomas and Beulah*, *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*, *Sonata Mulattica*, *Playlist for the Apocalypse* and *Collected Poems 1974-2004*. Her drama *The Darker Face of the Earth* was staged at the Kennedy Center in Washington and the National Theatre in London, and her song cycles with composers John Williams, Tania Leon, Richard Danielpour and others were performed at Tanglewood, Lincoln Center in New York and the Kennedy Center in Washington. Rita Dove teaches creative writing at the University of Virginia.