

Artemis II and the Next Moon Poem: Understanding the Production of Lunar Poetry in the Artemis Era

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Article Received: 28/06/2026

Article Accepted:30/07/2026

Published Online:31/07/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.07.445

Abstract:

Apollo Moon landings served as a catalyst that generated a canonical body of poetic responses in the 1960's and 70's. With Artemis II's lunar flyby, literature demands a next Moon poem, that should emerge directly in response to the extraordinary feat performed by the Artemis II's crew. After the launch of Artemis II, the next Moon poems are not delayed or absent, rather are segregated on various digital networks as poetic distribution differs in the 21st century. The pertinent question at the present moment is not whether Artemis II will contribute to the poetic canon or not, rather the cardinal question is in which mode of production would the poems take place.

By Analysing the poems available on digital media, this paper seeks to understand the poetic production of the next lunar poetic response in the Artemis era. This paper will analyse that how poetic responses to the Apollo Moon landings were rapidly canonized due to centralized mode of poetic production, consumption, and distribution, while on the other hand in 21st century, poetic responses on Artemis II are decentralized and their poetic production, consumption and distribution have changed from the time of Apollo.

This paper will also try to understand why the comparison of Artemis with Apollo should be limited to an extent. Artemis II marks the moment of return, not the first arrival. This distinction is crucial for comprehending the shift in lunar poetry. Poets writing in response to the Artemis II would see Moon as revisited frontier and their reinterpretation would be based on historical continuity, established by poets who wrote five decades back on the Apollo program.

Keywords: Artemis II, Apollo Program, Canon, Literary Production, Space, Lunar Poetry

Introduction

NASA's Artemis II (April 1-11, 2026) has formally brought the human civilization of the 21st century to the era of Artemis. Artemis program of NASA envisions to return

humans on the Moon and build a permanent lunar base on Moon to facilitate the space voyage in deep space. The lunar flyby of Artemis II, marks the return of humans near the Moon after decades of hiatus since Apollo program. The success of Artemis II is not cardinal for space science only but marks a moment of revival in cultural and literary imagination. Like Apollo program ignited a wave of literary and cultural contemplation, Artemis program is expected to revive the lunar interest and discourse in literature of the late 2020's. As poetry is swift in responding to the monumental achievements, a new wave of poetic responses is expected to be emerged after the extraordinary feat performed by the Artemis II.

Every canonical poet in English literature has written about Moon and “the history of poetry in all ages is the attempt to find new images for the moon” (Isaacs, 1952, p. 35). It is incredible to note that despite so much is already written on Moon, Moon in poetry does not feel exhaustive to read by reader and to write by poets. The cardinal question of the present moment is not whether Artemis missions would ignite a poetic revival of lunar discourse or not, which it inevitably would as it was observed during Apollo era, but what form such poetic responses will take and why the poetic responses have not yet coalesced into a canon of recognition as it was with the case of Apollo program.

While Apollo era missions ignited a wave of immediate and canonized poetic responses by American poets of the 1960's and early 1970's, the Artemis era if juxtaposed, is marked by the fact that poetic responses on the Artemis II and its program are emerging but are dispersed on digital networks, which have not yet achieved institutional recognition that would ultimately trouble the canonization of such responses. During the Apollo era, the dynamics of poetic production and distribution were not as diverse as it is now in the digital age of the 21st century. When humans landed on the Moon with Apollo 11, poems were produced immediately as response to the scientific achievement by American poets, and these poems were distributed with a linear distribution channels like literary journals, anthologies, and newspapers. Such poetic responses were distributed in limited channels and they were rapidly distributed through American cultural institutions. The visibility of such responses and cultural influence was amongst the reasons that why these responses received canonical status.

With Artemis II's lunar flyby of humans, literature demands a next Moon poem, that should emerge directly in response to the extraordinary feat performed by the Artemis II's crew. This paper argues that apparent absence of the next Moon poem is not due to the lack of poetic inspiration and imagination but a transformation of change in the temporal and cultural dynamics of poetic production and distribution. This paper further argues that next Moon poems are not delayed or absent, rather are segregated on various digital network as poetic distribution differs in the 21st century. Therefore, this paper argues that poetic responses on Artemis II are emerging from around the globe, but have not yet achieved

institutional recognition due to the disperse availability of these poems on internet, that would ultimately delay the canonization of such poetic responses.

Apollo Era and the Canonization of Lunar Poetry

Pre-Apollo, Moon had a long history in the cultural and literary imagination around the globe. Before humans reach on the Moon in 20th century and break a lot of myths and assumptions surrounding Moon, it had a personal historical association with the human civilization. Moon for many cultures and civilizations was a God or deity with special divine significance in religion and its mythology. For Ancient civilization, it was a way to map the times of the year, as they were heavily dependent on the Moon phases, thus early calendars were lunar calendars. For women, it was connected with their menstrual and fertility cycle as both share an almost similar monthly cycle period. Moon had held an emotion connect with people at nights, and had been seen as a source of madness, dreams, and unconscious instability.

Despite being unimaginably distant with earth, Moon had formed a relationship so strong with humans that when many on Earth celebrated in wonder and awe on the occasion of Apollo 11's Moon landing, many were grievous on the accomplishment of the most primitive space travel desire to touch the Moon. Poet Keijiro Suga in his poem, *Mother Moon*, shows the cultural disappointment of Moon landing, "you should not step on your mother, you know" (Suga, 2019, p. 65). The image of Moon in myths and cultural imagination, felt a shock when the Moon's surface encountered gigantic technology and men in scientific suites touching its surface which perhaps since its creation was almost untouched and chaste. The mythical era and romantic notion of the Moon was now mundane by the scientific advancement. Suddenly that distant Moon was under humans' feet and so was the myths and imaginations that had been adoring the Moon since the earliest times. Apollo landings created a demand for interpretations, artistic response, discourse, and reflection. Poetry became a medium to satiate the intellectual urge.

Editors and reporters felt the paucity of words to describe the extraordinary achievement of Apollo 11. New York Times editor lacked words to describe the grandeur and awe of Moon landing for printing in the issue of July 21, 1969. The editor A.M. Rosenthal decided to publish a commissioned poem by American poet Archibald MacLeish on the front page of New York Times, as he believed that only a poet could express the wisdom of Apollo 11. A.M Rosenthal later admitted, "we decided what the front page of The Times would need when the men landed was a poem. what the poet wrote would count most, but we also wanted to say to our readers, look, this paper does not know how to express how it feels this day and perhaps you don't either, so here is a fellow, a poet, who will try for all of us" (Rosenthal, 1989, para. 8). The New York Times published Archibald MacLeish's poem, *Voyage to the Moon*, that tried to capture the American spirit on the significance of this monumental achievement. MacLeish's American pride and sense of triumph was visible in these lines of the poem:

“You were wonder to us, unattainable,
a longing past the reach of longing,
a light beyond our light, our lives-perhaps
a meaning to us...

Now

our hands have touched you in your depth of
night” (MacLeish, 1969).

New York Times was and still is one of the most read papers in United States. This poem of Archibald MacLeish was distributed widely by this paper. Such poetic responses were facilitated by a relatively centralized cultural apparatus, that includes print media and literary journals. Poems like that of MacLeish’s got instant institutional recognition, that assisted in rapid canonization of such lunar poetry.

Many American poets published their poems as a response to the Moon landing in various print medias like that of literary journals, anthologies, newspapers, and book publications. Thus, literary culture was more centralized in the 1960’s and 70’s. Anthologies like that of *Inside Outer Space: New Poems of the Space Age* edited by Robert Vas Dias collected many poems that were more like an ode on the Apollo landings. Such anthologies united a poetic discourse that were “continually in need of a language to reveal what we see and feel: what we are” (Dias, 1970, p. xxxviii). Importantly these poetic responses were rapidly canonized and became a part of recognizable literary discourse surrounding space exploration.

Many poets in this anthology like W.H. Auden, Babette Deutsch, James Dickey, Stanley Kunitz, Anne Sexton, and Diane Wakoski were already established poets when they contributed to this anthology, that assisted the poems to enter serious literary discussions almost immediately. These poems had aesthetic power and were original in their intellectual discourse to contemplate the new image of Moon post Apollo landings. According to Bloom (1994), “one breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength, which is constituted primarily of an amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction” (p. 32). These poems were quickly canonized by the aesthetic power they hold and by the modes of poetic production that made them easily accessible to the institutional gaze.

Artemis II and the Lunar Return

NASA’s history is a testimony of some extraordinary courage and scientific will. With Artemis program, NASA plans to land the humans on the Moon with later Artemis missions and to make a permanent lunar base to facilitate voyages in deep space. Politically, funding Artemis program was intricate task, as unlike Apollo, Artemis has no political agenda to fulfil. This time Artemis is not venturing out to win another space race; this time the motives are scientific enough if not truly political. During Artemis program “the geopolitical events between the United States and Soviet Union that sparked the Mercury,

Gemini, and Apollo programs culminating in the lunar landing missions no longer existed. Pushing for a new, more ambitious human spaceflight program would be a hard sell to the Congress and the American people” (Young, 2025, p. x).

Somehow after much delays Artemis 1 and Artemis II are recently launched with success. Artemis II (April 1-11, 2026) has travelled humans near the Moon with the lunar flyby and returned humans successfully back to Earth. This is the first time since Apollo 17 in 1972, that humans went near the Moon. Artemis II also broke the record of travelling the farthest from Earth than any human beings, breaking the record of Apollo 13 astronauts. Another reason that snatched attention from around the globe is because of many historical ‘firsts’ that is associated with Artemis II. Reid Wiseman, the commander of the Artemis II, became the oldest person beyond low Earth orbit. Victor Glover, the pilot, became the first person of colour to go near the Moon. Christina Koch, the mission specialist, became the first woman to go farthest than any women in space. Jerney Hansen, the mission specialist, and Canadian national became the first non-American to travel near the Moon.

This time NASA included a person of colour after learning from the cultural mistake it did with Apollo program. Gil Scott Heron’s poem *Whitey on the Moon*, published in 1970, triggered a national discourse of inclusion in space programs, that ultimately forced NASA to include a black American and a woman with the Artemis program. This is what the poetry does, it teaches a society to learn from the past mistakes and do better with rectification. This diversity with crew is not natural, rather is much symbolic and intricate if one understands the cultural impact of missions like Apollo and Artemis. This symbolic diversity and historical ‘firsts’ are the reasons why Artemis program is gaining a lot of attention from poets, artists, and popular culture.

But there is one significant difference this time, the comparison of Artemis with Apollo should be limited to an extent. The effervescence which was there with first human Moon landing of Apollo 11 is not justified to compare with the lunar return of Artemis II. With Apollo 11, humans saw something unseen in the past, this was the first time when humans ventured out on some another extraterrestrial entity since the creation. So, comparing Artemis II’s return with Apollo 11’s effervescent is not ethical. Artemis II marks the moment of return, not the first arrival. This distinction is crucial for comprehending the shift in lunar poetics. Poets writing in response to the Artemis II would see Moon as revisited frontier and their reinterpretation would be based on historical continuity, established by poets who wrote five decades back on the Apollo program.

Early Poetic Responses on Artemis II and the Shift in the Modes of Literary Production

Preliminary poetic responses have begun to emerge on Artemis II, but unlike responses on Apollo program, Artemis responses are scattered across digital platforms. It is pertinent to expect such responses on digital platforms as in late 2020’s, the mode of poetic production has conveniently shifted towards the digital medium. Poetic responses on Artemis

II are traceable with online search of its keywords. Early poetic responses are found on websites, blogs, and social media indicates the fact that poetic engagement with the Artemis mission is already underway and ongoing. These responses are quick to write as the agency of production lies with the poet assigned to them by the internet.

Poet Kate Belew used Substack, an online platform to write her poem *Artemis II*. Belew wrote a meditative poem to contemplate the wonder and awe ignited by the Artemis II. Belew writes:

“I saw the moon through my television yesterday,
and then craned my neck through buildings
to see her again. I wonder how astronauts call
down to us on Earth?.....
.....I live in New York City, not a place that is known
For its night sky, and yet, when I get real quiet, I hear it.
the hum of everything connected. The cosmos
was created as a reflection of the divine. We do not need
to imagine what that looks like; it looks like the moon” (Belew, 2026).

Belew’s poem talks about the urban isolation of a New Yorker and how still she is able to connect herself with the cosmic connection of the wider cosmos. Belew sees Moon through the mediation of technology as broadcasted by NASA in the livestreams, and then she also sees the Moon directly to showcases the connectedness of humans with the Moon.

Another poem is published in the self-publishing website called All Poetry, that gives space to poets to write under their forum. A poet with an account named Leerobertpoole wrote a poem *Artemis II* and reflects his individual contemplation on the Moon during the age of Artemis. He writes:

“And so I make my steps
To see a new future,
For a new day to begin...
Where man is reaching
His hand for the moon.
To Say- the launch of Artemis II-
To go merrily
Around the moon,
Is for man to see the far side,
The dark side of the moon,
To behold in our lives.
For a new hour to begin:” (Leerobertpoole, 2026).

This poem reads like a meditation of the human possibilities especially in the age of Artemis. As NASA plans to establish Moon base with later Artemis missions, the poem

foresees an extraterrestrial utopia on the Moon. Leerobertpoole predicts a new era to start with the Artemis mission on Earth and on the Moon.

Another poem *Artemis II* is written by poet Tor Magnor Solvang on the website PoemHunter.com. Solvang writes:

“A rocket soared, April’s first day

From Kennedy, to light the way.

Artemis II, a crew on board,

Beyond Earth’s orbit, newly explored” (Solvang, 2026).

Solvang’s poem reads as an excitement on the occasion of Artemis II’s launch. Solvang journals the Artemis mission in his poem, as it was journaled in the media. Media was informing every second of Artemis mission, that kept everyone interested in what next.

Another poem was shared by poet EJRD Hardy on the Facebook group named Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC). In the poem titled *Artemis II*, Hardy writes:

“Wanting to be an astronaut, was considered pretty cool

But, depending on your gender or race

Some may have even laughed in your face

But, regardless of the obstacles placed

You continued to race that race

You maintained that lifelong dream” (Hardy, 2026).

Hardy poem reads like an inspirational tribute to the Artemis crew who overcame the social and cultural stigma associated with their race and gender. As Apollo era poems critiqued the lack of representation and diversity within the crew, Artemis era poem like this appreciates the inclusion of various race and gender in the space exploration. The poem is a direct celebration of public euphoria on the inclusion of a person of colour, Victor Glover, and a woman, Christina Koch with the Artemis II mission.

One thing to notice about these early responses are that unlike Apollo era poems which were highly critical either on the lack of representation, hefty budgets, violation of Moon’s ecology, and space imperialism, these early responses on contrast are celebratory odes, as NASA had included people from different race and gender in this mission and did not make the mistakes which it did with the Apollo program. Unlike Apollo era poems, these poems are not critical on the violation of the Moon’s ecological loss, as if these poets have accepted the fact that for scientific advancement, Moon’s ecology would have to bear the cost.

In the Artemis era, these poems are published online that shows the shift in the modes of literary production, consumption and distribution. These poems emerged from a decentralized environment but the question of their canonical status is still under great oblivion. According to Guillory (2023), “it might still be the case that canon formation

functions to exclude works by minority writers who do manage to acquire the means of literary production” (p. 63). So even if the means of online literary production has provided the voices to marginalized writers, it does not guarantee the canonical status as these responses are segregated on a wider platform that ultimately troubles the canon formation and recognition.

The relative obscurity of these poems, available on internet, should by no means be understood and interpreted as a lack of literary significance and merit, rather these poems reflect a shift in the modes of literary production and circulation in the 21st century. During the Artemis era, and the onset of digital age, these poetic expressions are immediate and widespread. It is hard to judge their literary merit of these poems as the means of production goes against the ideals of conventional publishing. Literary institution who judges a poem for the canonical status have been judging the poems on their conventional publishing status.

Conclusion: From Canon to Network

During Apollo era, one of the major reasons that contributed in the rapid canonization of poetry was directly related to the fact that during 1960's and 70's there was limited number of platform available. Poets were getting their works published in a more centralized forums like anthologies, newspapers, and poetry books, that facilitated the rapid consolidation of certain texts into literary canon. Through traditional publishing, the visibility of a text was not scattered as in the case of online publication. Academic institution and those responsible for canon formation found Apollo era poems quite easily as the texts were more centralized then. This led to the timely canonization of certain texts.

In contrast, the effervescence and proliferation of digital media in the 21st century has resulted in a more segregated and decentralised literary landscape. Poetic responses on the Artemis have emerged instantaneously in the contemporary media environment but it would take time and years for these responses to be consolidated and canonized. With the preliminary responses on Artemis, it is visible that there is not yet a poem that has gained equal attention as gained by *Voyage to the Moon* by Archibald MacLeish, but the next Moon poem is not absent from the scene, rather the next Moon is segregated and distributed across a range of platforms online. These poems may not form canon but are forming digital networks that connects them all.

The next Moon poem is not delayed or absent but available in networks that awaits the academic institution to recognize them and canonize them as they did with Apollo poetic responses. These poetic responses on Artemis II have a global reach, as any reader might read them from anywhere of the world. According to Bowers (2008), “a canonical work has to extend its influence beyond its home country” (p. 35). These poems are available around the globe through the means of digital and their canonical status lies in the womb of future, but it is important to note that “the concept of the canon itself is not entirely stable and has shifted over time” (Aston, 2020, p. 62). The next Moon poem is available in digital networks

and indicates a transformation in the mode of poetic production, consumption, and distribution.

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