

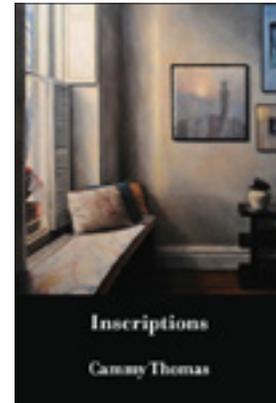
Inscriptions by Cammy Thomas

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Letting Go Of Who We Were

Review by Emily Pineau

“Our ghosts are always with us, / their stinks, their bad habits, always / as much as we’re with them,” Cammy Thomas writes in her poem, “The Other You.” Thomas’s poetry collection *Inscriptions* is haunting, yet comforting, and is deeply rooted with sharp, vivid images. This collection, like people’s lives, is broken up into three sections : I. SWEET BROKE DOWN, II. POEMS IN MEMORY OF ELEANOR THOMAS ELLIOTT, and III. A WINDY KISS, for Elly. Our sections in life—past, present, and future—make up who we are. Thomas’s poem “The Other You” seems to be the heart of this collection, describing how our past selves live inside of us. Each poem in *Inscriptions* reads as if they are various versions of Thomas—only now, the poems also exist within us as she reveals the way she sees people, loss, and nature.

The last line in Thomas’s “The Other You” reads, “You can’t forgive the one who hurt you. / Only the-you-from-then can do that, / and she will never be ready,” (p.12). This powerful line makes me think about closure and forgiveness differently. Sometimes past relationships feel like they happened in another lifetime, yet the hurt remains. Though, if you understand that you are a different person now then you were before, you are separating yourself from this pain—The pain is no longer yours—It belongs to the old you. The old you will hold onto the memory and stay in the moment so that the new version of you can move on from it.

In addition, in Thomas’s “On the Island of Staffa,” a woman is climbing a hill, gasping as though she is both exhausted and devastated. When she surrenders her husband’s ashes to the wind on top of the hill, the reader can imagine the wall of grief that hits her. We are not left feeling empty, though. Thomas writes, “Yes, yes, it’s dust, /yes it is. /It could be anyone, / and could there be anyone/ who wouldn’t want this kind of love?” (p.31). This line reveals that the kind of love that’s most painful to lose is the best kind to have. Rather than the woman facing the absence of love, she is encompassed by the presence of it when the wind picks her husband up. The feeling of this poem reminds me of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem, “Annabel Lee.” In English class, my classmates and I remarked about how sad and tragic Poe’s poem is, but my English teacher had a different take on it. She said, “Imagine being loved like that, though. Who wouldn’t want that type of love?” This sentiment resonated with me, and now when I read Thomas’s poem I feel like the grieving woman’s love trumps her sadness.

Also, Thomas’s poem “Without Talking” has an deeply impacting ending that not only makes the reader want to hear more, but also makes the reader want more out of life, relationships, and themselves. Each line is

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spaced out so that the poem reads like a conversation—It has the feeling of a pin-pong match. On page 13 Thomas writes:

*He said don't use
your wall, the words
the words defend
and don't open—
but they keep...
what saves you,
(do it without talking),
again, again, again,
oh and without them*

Instead of being in a straight line down, the poem itself is breaking out of its comfort zone and is letting the feeling of the words shape it, rather than letting the actual words shape it. I feel like this poem is applicable to the process of writing especially, because in order to successfully write an effective, moving, and authentic piece you need to write “without talking.” If you reveal your scenes and feelings with urgency and passion your readers can understand you without you explaining yourself to them.

Throughout *Inscriptions* it is not necessary for Thomas to explain herself for readers to understand her. In her poems about death or disappointment, she weaves in some hope, making us feel like it is possible to move on and find new things and people in life to focus on and to love. Also, when writing about love, Thomas reveals the ugly, raw truth, but this makes the relationships feel more accessible, honest, and real. I hope to emulate Thomas's authenticity in my own writing, as she has become a poet that I can identify with on both a human and creative level.

