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READING COMPANION

Beg No Pardon, by Lynne Thompson

Sample poem:

Crescent

What today is like
is unlike any other thing
that ever will be.
The saucer will never again
hold its cup at just this angle.
A shadow that's begun to wane
will continue to fade forever.
A baby, seeing her brother
for the first time,
will never again see him
for the first time;
he is going out the door.
This should make you
neither happy nor sad;
this is what makes you.

Questions to consider:

1. Read the opening poem of the collection, "The Poet, Applying for a Job, Cites Her Previous Experience" (1). What does this poem tell you about the speaker's understanding of what poetry is? How does it make you think about poetry in a different way? How does it make you think about biography in poetry?
2. Why does Thompson title her poem "Imperfect Ghazal for an Unknown Mother" (6)? Review the rules of the Ghazal to understand expectations of the form: (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ghazal>). How does the form add meaning to the poem?
3. In "Seed of Mango, Seed of Maize" (10), the speaker describes her two grandmothers and how she is connected to them. What is the effect of the two contrasting descriptions? Explore the use of parallel structure between the two stanzas and its effect on the reader.
4. Thompson includes an epigraph from poet Chris Abani in the poem "Raffia" (33) and then uses each of the lines to begin a stanza of her poem. The form is known as a "glosa" which requires (a) a cabeza, i.e., a quatrain from another poet who must be acknowledged; (b) four ten-line stanzas, each ending with one of the lines in sequence from the cabeza; and (c) a scheme that rhymes lines six and nine with the final word of line ten. In Thompson's glosa, she inverts the sequence to *begin* each stanza with a line from the cabeza. How do her stanzas develop the images and ideas from Abani's excerpt?
5. Throughout the collection, Thompson uses surprising and vivid images. Select three-five such images and explore how they function within the poem.
6. Read "To Blackness" (39). Notice which references are unfamiliar, and research them. How do they serve to develop an understanding of "blackness"? How do all of the references/images work together to develop this understanding?

7. In "Scissors" (49) Thompson writes "There's no synonym / for scissors" and later gives examples of other words for which there are no synonyms. How do these words create contrast with the words for which she lists synonyms? What meaning can you extract from whether or not a word has synonyms?
8. What themes do you notice in *Beg No Pardon*? Where do you notice them occurring?

Writing Prompts:

1. Read "Song for Two Immigrants" (30). Craft your own poem in which, in the first stanza, you write in response to the prompt "To me, you were..." and in the second stanza, "...here you are...".
2. Write your own list of words without synonyms (see "Scissors" [49]) and use them to write a poem in which you create contrast with a list of synonyms.
3. Using "I am Grenadine" (60-1) as a model, write a poem in which you use place, history, and nature to describe who you are.
4. Select four lines from a poem in the collection. Use each as the first line of a stanza in which you connect the line to your own history and experience, as Thompson does in "Raffia" (33).

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

Now in Color, Jacqueline Balderrama

Each Crumbling House, Melody S. Gee

Gloss, Ida Stewart

Through a Red Place, Rebecca Pelky

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

Caribbean Literature/History

Creative Writing/Poetry

Ethnic & Gender Studies

Women's Studies

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