

***In the Shadow of the Globe* by Michelle Cameron: Pride, Passion, Art
by Loren Kleinman**

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Michelle Cameron's narrative poem *In the Shadow of the Globe* is an intelligent, thought provoking, and ambitious piece of art. She takes us on an extraordinary journey through Shakespeare's life and times. Cameron molds the poem into ten acts, which further detail Shakespeare's infidelities with the Dark Lady; his passion for work; the plague blanketing over London; the circumstances surrounding the construction of The Globe theater; and his company of actors. She creates a haunting type of historical fiction. The characters she invents, and pulls from history, carry with them an emotional universe that is distinct and comprehensible; they show us into their lives and at the same time stir our own imaginations.

In the act "Pride & Passion," not only do we catch a glimpse of who this mysterious "Dark Lady" is, by way of her servant, we get a picture of the relationship between Shakespeare and his wife:

*Married? Oh, yes, to some drab
buried in the country -
something, too, about a son lost -
But he doesn't waste their too-few hours
in complaints, except when she is late
to meet him at their favorite spot
by Southampton's roses,
near the misting fountains
. . . he'll have scattered a deep red cushion
upon the stone ledge, counting minutes
plucking petals, showering her. . . (42-43)*

Cameron sets up an interesting case here, because throughout the poem we never actually get monologue from the "Dark Lady," we only get a servant's commentary. Cameron creates an instance where we question even the existence of the "Dark Lady." If we only get a servant's explanation and not "The Dark Lady," then how do we know this mistress is real, or maybe the servant is "The Dark Lady"? I wasn't sure if that's the idea Cameron intended, but I found it magnetic.

When we get to hear from William Shakespeare, Cameron writes him as hot-blooded, passionate --- a lustful lunatic. He is almost wickedly sexual, while explaining his desire for his mistress and his detachment from his wife in "Remembering Avon's Haystacks":

*At sixteen, all I thought of
was this pole between my legs
and where I could stick it.
. . . Her breasts high and proud,
my palms itched for them,*

and for her moan and the slow,
sure surge of her generous hips.
They've always wanted to know
how I feel toward, this wife
I left behind, waiting,
watering her impatience
with buckets from Avon's streams. (38)

Cameron constructs a conflicted Shakespeare, focusing on his personal life. This is a vision we rarely see, as we are more concerned with Shakespeare the artist, not Shakespeare the man. Cameron's Shakespeare struggles with loyalty, and questions matters of devotion. Is it with his wife or with his mistress? What drives this inclination toward adultery? Cameron later hints in a monologue, directed toward Shakespeare, by his wife Anne Hathaway that it's because of creative disruption. She writes him:

(. . .You'd please us, my dear, to spend
a little time with us who miss you so.
I promise we will let you write.) (41)

We are introduced to a problem: Shakespeare feels no creative energy at home- partially inspired by Anne. They share a passionless marriage, one based through letters that illustrate a wife and mother's desperate cry for her husband's attention and response. In a way, Shakespeare continues relations with Anne almost on a professional level, as his duty should face his family; but his passion rests with this mystery woman--- a woman that makes Shakespeare ache "to be sucked" (38). We also see a vision of an artist: a man always wanting more, longing to experience life, and what better way but with another life, another body. We see a Shakespeare in search of an "ultimate pleasure," visceral moments to fuel his creative genius, which should get him through the restlessness of constructing The Globe theater.

Aesthetically, Cameron's set up for this poem is ideal. I felt as if I was really playing audience: watching the characters move about their lives, watching them interact with one another, their flaws exposed only to observers, the dramatic irony, and Shakespeare's descent from a prominent player in the formation of The Globe to an "oddment" (189). We also witness Shakespeare's shift of emotion from the "Dark Lady" to Mary Burbage in the scene "The Stolen Night":

I never expected that Mary,
of all my women,
would taste most flavorful to my tongue,
that she would come to me,
rising from the evening mist as a fugue,
that we would move slowly,
in a dream toward one another,
clothes slip away as though cast by a spell,
our bodies meeting, melding, not one word spoken
not one needed. (169)

Cameron suggests even further Shakespeare's adulterous ways, his obsession with women, with bodies, with the experiences and the "different sensations" they bring to him (169). Shakespeare also displays a weakness for stability, which may be the statement of the artist. How do you create from only one experience, or from a lack of? This is something stability does not provide: change, some difference that spawns creation. And, Cameron writes this desperation into her character.

In the Shadow of the Globe is captivating and luminescent. Cameron creates layers of insight into a period of artistic evolution. Within the deep tissue of her work, she constructs characters that evoke feeling and emotion; that in a sense act out their own destiny. As a reader, I respected the details of the story, and found myself attentive to Cameron's presentation. She touches the skin of another world and ignites the page. Whether fact or fiction, or both, Cameron recognizes the importance of story, narrative, and character development. The poem's beauty rests in Cameron's ability to offer a coherent and unified story while embodying personal vision.