

Book Review

Cordless (2014) by Thomas Raphael Verny. Victoria, BC: Ekstasis Editions Canada, LTD. 109 pp. ISBN: 9781771710657, 9781771710664

One might hope or expect such a vocal birth psychology advocate to keep his words hopeful and cheery, urging us all on toward the possibility of a completely healed world. But the author is much more candid and honest about his humanness than that. Thomas Verny mines his personal and professional experiences in this collection of poems. Nothing about life is left untouched, from the deeply religious to those personally poignant moments of intimate failures, passion, and undying love. The reader will find him questioning, reflecting, and, at times, doubting. In “Fine Print,” he reflects:

Eons ago, before I signed
On the dotted line...
I should have read the fine print. (p. 15)

We now have over three decades of research supporting the ancient knowledge that consciousness is alive and well long before one’s birth. Our in-utero experiences inform our life paths, providing challenges and opportunities for healing... not just for our own wounds, but those of humanity. With the help of birth psychology, its researchers, practitioners, and advocates, this innate understanding is becoming easier to name and use as a healing tool. Although *Cordless* was not written specifically for the PPN community, it belongs here. Verny is one of us. He is human, like all of us.

Cordless, is broken into five parts, but it moves more like the weaving of a tapestry than properly divided sections, giving the reader a sense of listening quietly around the fire on a winter night while an old friend reminisces about their life. The birth psychology themes of trauma, healing, self-reflection, intimacy, and love were apparent throughout this collection. They were the threads I resonated with the most. Verny says in the introduction:

This collection of poems is a kaleidoscope, not a homogenous entity.

If there is one theme, it is life lived under the long dark shadow of the horrors of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. (p. 7)

Collective Trauma

Several poems make explicit the indelible marks left on the Jewish psyche by the Nazi war machine, offering a blood-red pattern for serious personal reflection in the fabric of this collection. Regardless of whether we feel a personal connection to it, anyone alive in the western world today has been epigenetically influenced by World War II. In “Amongst the McGregors and the Millers,” Verny writes:

My own Jewish past,
when shared with them
is heard as ancient history,
like the Boer War,
or the genocide in Rwanda
tragic and regrettable
while to me
it is a living pain
burning fiercely and constantly
deep inside me
resisting all attempts
to extinguish it. (p. 42-43)

I found each of the poems in this war-torn thread both edifying and humbling. Our deepest collective pains are often the ones left silent in the dark. The impact of war on our species is universal. Terror and uncertainty have left their marks on all of us. Every child conceived in love, nourished, and treated with kindness, is a salve that helps to redirect our collective trajectory toward one of peace and tolerance. Verny uses poetry as a subtly powerful tool for clarifying these feelings, holding them in the light, and thus, promoting transgenerational healing.

Love and Sex

Verny wanders through memories and musings of romance, touching on many aspects of sex and intimacy. These pieces felt especially significant to birth psychology. We often discuss reproduction, but sometime fall short of addressing sex itself. It’s what makes every one of us—even if indirectly. The effects of our openness or judgment around sex

have transgenerational impacts. We need to talk about it and I'm very glad Verna does so in *Cordless*.

There is memorable sex,
fabulous sex, lousy sex,
and all of the colors of the rainbow in between. (p. 100)

He turns to face love's myriad feelings, from passion's unquenchable thirst in "Longing" to the important question of how to share our hard-won wisdom with our children in "Letter to My Son on His Sixteenth Birthday: A Beginner's Guide to Women and Sex."

Self-Reflection and Self-Forgiveness

Poems such as "Cordless" reconnect me with tenderness and vulnerability: two things that allow me to love no matter what. In the collection's title piece, most obviously named in connection to birth psychology, Verna calls on the reader to search their own in utero memories:

Do you remember
when your blood was her blood,
when your feelings were her feelings,
when your thoughts were her thoughts,
when you were one?

Then with a single cut
your world changed:
separated, set loose,
abandoned, and liberated,
programmed like a moth
to forever thirst
for the light,
yearning and searching
for what was lost. (p. 66)

I loved this passage. It is perhaps the commonest thread of all—an essential key to one's self-acceptance in the world of duality.

Cordless forgives the naïve assumption that we can somehow erase the pain of being human. Verna's personal reflections offer an alternate lens for gauging this journey. We can build a beautiful foundation, with love, understanding, and belonging. We can be there for each other and

turn toward peace at every opportunity. But we can also, as Verny expresses—even defiantly—throughout this poetry collection, allow and acknowledge the stains of living that are inherent to and inevitable for all people. We cannot escape ourselves...and needn't bother trying to. In "The Arcanum of My Misdeeds," he writes:

I will keep all my polyglot memories.
I will not whitewash my misdeeds. (p. 56)

Hope

So much can happen in a human life. Even with a "perfect" birth and a "happy" family, we can fall and struggle to get back up. When we want to change our patterns, not just for our families and ourselves, but for the future of other beings, we need forgiveness and hope. "Redemption" recounts the story of Baba Yaga beautifully, reminding us that we are all deserving of forgiveness and love:

Baba Yaga hoists Natasha tenderly
and cloisters her in her arms.
Natasha opens one eye then the other,
 beholds Baba Yaga
 unlike all the others in the past,
she does not recoil in horror and disgust
 rather she smiles sweetly
and kisses Baba Yaga on the cheek. (p. 73)

Once, in passing, Verny allayed my concerns about the modern world with a calm, kind voice, saying he was hopeful about humanity. I found it hard to believe he was seeing the pain and confusion I was encountering in the world. *Cordless* shows me that he did, indeed, understand. And from that understanding, he was still hopeful. This book of poetry is one I not only suggest for those of us studying human consciousness and pre-and perinatal psychology, but for anyone who self reflects about their lives.

Reviewed by Stephanie DeRosier
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