



## Skin, Inc.: Identity Repair Poems

By Thomas Sayers Ellis

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**Skin, Inc.: Identity Repair Poems** By Thomas Sayers Ellis

**The brilliant and provocative second book of poems by Thomas Sayers Ellis, now available in paperback**

*Skin, Inc.* is Thomas Sayers Ellis's ambitious argument in sound and image for an America whose identity is in need of repair. In lyric sequences and with his own photographs, Ellis traverses the African American and American literary landscapes and performs tributes for the Godfather of Soul, James Brown; the King of Pop, Michael Jackson; and the election of President Barack Obama. This book assures Ellis's place as one of the most audacious poets now writing.

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## **Skin, Inc.: Identity Repair Poems By Thomas Sayers Ellis Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Ellis's highly anticipated second collection has a bit of everything: poems in an array of forms--a concrete poem meditating on the English vowels and money, an abecedarian list of "Black Writing" terminology, a photo essay shot at the James Brown memorial at Harlem's Apollo Theatre; prose poems; meditations on New Yorker covers; and lots more. Throughout, Ellis (The Maverick Room) makes a complicated, often contradictory critique of race relations in America; he has as many self-corrections to put into practice, "sucker-punching I," as he does punches aimed at others: "One of these badass/ glorious days,/ the signs and negative sounds/ that worked against us/ will all begin their tenures/ of service.../ It has already begun with/ 'Nigger' and 'Bitch.'" While much of his work would be right at home on a spoken-word stage--Ellis is an extraordinary reader of his poems--he feels deeply uneasy about the pigeonholing of black poetry, "as if the craft of our/ inherited calling had only/ two camps of Blackness,/ 'Academic' and 'Spoken Word.'" This big book concludes with an amazing 35-page biography/elegy for Michael Jackson and the era through which he lived, and which he deeply affected. No doubt, this is a major book.

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From [Booklist](#)

Ellis positions himself between the two primary schools of contemporary poetry (not only African American poetry, although the divide is especially noticeable there), which he defines as "Academic" and "Spoken Word" in his poem "No Easy Trick." The "trick" is to bridge those apparent opposites, which he does superlatively in his second full collection. The cadence of speech is audible on the page, in his "uneven ribs of verse" that worry "text to talk and talk to text." In the searing tradition of Ai, Ellis takes on the thorny questions of race and culture, and never mincing words about the damage racism has done: "If punctuation / were a punch, / I'd publish line breaks of fists." But he sees poets as "identity repair-people, / faders of trick moves, trope-a-dopes / and okee dokes, / laying our dice down like ( ) like we love us." A photographer as well as a poet, Ellis includes a sequence that combines the two art forms in homage to James Brown; another sequence explores the complex image and tragic reality of Michael Jackson's life. Ellis's distinctive voice offers a new model for written orature, and his audience steadily widens. --Patricia Monaghan

Review

"No doubt, this is a major book." ?*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"The fine and noble tradition of protest poetry is in safe, strong hands." ?*The New York Journal of Books*

"In work like this, Ellis is writing some of the finest, truly public poetry of our time." ?*David Orr*

"Ellis has something to say about the moment we're in, and he is that rare breed of poet, the kind whose works will be studied for generations to come, whose name will be uttered alongside that other great T.S." ?*Robin D. G. Kelley*

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