

Immigrant Model By Mihaela Moscaliuc
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Review by Dennis Daly

LIKE MYTHOLOGICAL WEREWOLVES rising from musty crypts, these passionate poetic lines of Mihaela Moscaliuc's *Immigrant Model* prowl over page warmth feeding from the flesh of grim fables and drinking the metallic blood of modern mechanistic life.

Moscaliuc mixes unfortunate history, the unhappiness of others, and bleak folklore in her labyrinthine journey into the heart of gothic darkness. Along the way her persona develops a survivor's surreal logic of alternating stoicism and fear, tempered by acute powers of observation. The poet's major pieces are cosmopolitan in nature, set in Madagascar, Romania, Spain, the Ukraine, America, and even Ireland.

The first poem after the introductory piece Moscaliuc entitles *Self-Portrait with Monk*. She describes a monk festooned in garlic and pushing a wheelbarrow. Then the poet invokes that strange novel of murder and mysterious mayhem, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, for atmospheric effect. The narrative quickens, alters its flight, and changes into something wicked or wonderful that comes our way. The poet describes her ownership of the action as follows,

*He cooks and feeds and scrubs but never eats, my monk,
spends lunch elbow-deep in suds or scratching the bellies of cats.*

*No wonder he's so famished by the time Cassiopeia arrives.
Then black chiffon and ivory flesh stream upward,
shape-shifting in flight: raven, whiskered bat, pricolici, varcolaci.
At dawn, he lands between two rose bushes, soot in his mouth,
weeping who knows why, my celestial monk,
torn cassock glistening with spent saliva, rapture in upturned eyes.*

In *Turning the Bones*, Moscaliuc uses straightforward narrative to relate a seemingly ghastly ritual practiced by villagers in Madagascar in which the shrouded bones of relatives are temporarily disinterred and danced with. The occasion calls for good food, local brews, and colorful dress. Carthusian monks would understand this ceremony of remembering death and examining mortality. Here is the heart of the poem,



Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

*... bundles heaved up
onto woven straw mats, names coursing the cheering crowd.
Perfumed and swathed in new damask, bodies are invited to dance.
In this hummock of tall grass, in the eye of the Indian Ocean,
the living and the dead reclaim themselves, flowery skirts
flapping against the bouquet of bones, bones reshuffling
as they warm to the tunes of trumpets and clarinets.*

The lengthy poem Ana to Manole reinterprets a chilling Romanian folktale that certainly rings true in the art world of today. Eyes wide open, the artist—here a mason—sacrifices his family to the needs of his patron, his ego, and his audience. He walls his pregnant wife up, betrays her for the ephemeral, only to be destroyed himself, turned into a cheap tourist destination. The poet describes Manole's fate through the eyes of Ana,

*You raised the wall till it cinctured me whole,
silt shored against carcass, and for the glory of what?
A toe ring in the god's trinket box, this masterpiece
you then bragged you could outshine.
I say it was the jaded gods having fun.
To think you could win their grace
with gilded turrets, dream yourself
a welder of shadows.
You fashioned the voice out of fear
you'll stay a mason, master bricklayer
instead of Creator, so here we are:
you, water fountain fed pennies by tourists
too sated to invent their own myths*

For harrowing detail and lyrical fury very few poems can touch Moscaliuc's sectional poem entitled *Radioactive Wolves: A Retelling*. Divided into two major parts the poem first relates the Chernobyl catastrophe of 1986 and its aftermath and then tells a fictional tale based on real events that occurred at an infamous Romanian orphanage. Both sections deconstruct misery into detail packed with dread, often lyrical. Consider this comment from the Chernobyl section on government helpfulness,

*All books disappeared, all important ones,
on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on X-rays.
The medical bulletins too, vanished.
Those who could took potassium iodine.
For that, you really needed to know someone.*

*A sign we could follow, live by:
as long as there were sparrows and pigeons in town
we could nest there.*

My favorite poem in this haunting collection, *Memoir*, combines righteous anger with passionate celebration. Nothing surreal here, the nerve endings are too raw. Moscaliuc portrays the despicable and wealth-besotted dictators of Romania, Elana and Nicolae Ceausecu, after twenty-five

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

years of terrorizing their people, denying the obvious. Dragged before a firing squad of machine gunners they collected their well-deserved rewards. And, yes, Elana, did indeed actively participate in the countless atrocities. Both the abbreviated show trial and the execution were filmed. The piece ends in catharsis and relief,

*You may have understood the story of the firing squad,
how, fearing clones, we measured and re-measured the corpses,
shot and reshot them. We each craved a bit of dried blood,
a frayed cuticle, an eyebrow stump, a finger
on the trigger, so we replayed the execution all through Christmas,
kissed our informers, broke bread with strangers,
stopped stoning strays, begged Gypsies for forgiveness.
We loved as only people who cannot get enough of death love,
we loved unconditionally for one long day that Christmas of 1989.*

Immigrant Model, the final and title poem in this collection works wonderfully. The poet infuses her protagonist with mystery and sensuousness. Models, at least the very best of them, channel natural processes in ways unknown even to them. They connect with an artistic perception and stoke it further. Add in the immigrant's complex and sometimes fluctuating identity and an interesting, often darker, dynamic occurs. Model perceives her artistic interpreters and then seeks to judge them in these lines,

*... as students sketch, she re-roots:
the desiccated belly of her Moldavian village creek
toothed with rocks, eyed with shriveled minnows,
but she can still feel their eye, the hammock of her body
swayed by the screech of charcoals' smooth incisions.
Tonight she steals in to see herself in various stages
of completion, looks for the hand knowing enough, kind enough
to release her.*

Bats flitting in from the night sky, Moscaliuc's poems may startle. Mornings after, one remembers only their magic.