

ANA DOINA

Metempsychosis

Cher, my friend, and I are driving back
after visiting the Immigration Museum
on Ellis Island. There, we playfully imagined
long-lost ancestors smiling back at us
from the nineteenth-century pictures. A townswoman
donning a fancy feathered hat looked like her,
a Gypsy matron smoking a long pipe looked
like me. All in good fun. Now, on the turnpike,
at the end of a hot August day, I try to disregard
the traffic, the exhaust, the nasty NY drivers
fishtailing brazenly to gain a few inches of space
closer to their destination. Inside the air-conditioned car,
Cher tells me she believes in reincarnation, mentions
Babylonian gods, Egyptian myths, transmigration,
trying to elicit more than just a raised eyebrow on my part.

At the edge of the highway, the meadow sparkles
in the sunset. Five great blue herons rise above
the low-tide waters and quivering reeds.
Their wide wingspan, their ease of movement,
make me wish I too could escape the traffic and smog.

I listen to Cher politely, unconvinced—parallel
universes, past lives. Suddenly, she asks: “If it were
possible, what would you like to come back as?”
Really? Is *this* how the physical reality’s discomfort
and disappointments get solved? The perfect afterlife
reclaimed as a different shape, in a different era,
or as a second chance to fulfill lost dreams?
“I’d like to come back as a song.” I say, “Who needs
to live again the doom of a decaying body?” But then

I see myself at ten, in the ballet studio,
dark hair pulled back in a low bun, glowing
peach complexion, dressed in a sleek white leotard,
a vaporous silk skirt, satin slippers, dancing alone
in front of a wall-sized mirror—the *balancé*, the *brisé*
the *arabesque*. Long limbs, narrow waist, budding
breasts, the grace of an ephemeral body at its most
vulnerable, fleeting age, no longer a child, not yet

a woman, deep in concentration, in search
of unreachable perfection. Yet, only now,
looking back, I savor the beauty of it all.

Cinderella

“You shouldn’t go to the ball,” she says.
“It’s not for you. You’d have to have been
born glamorous to fit in with the ball crowd.
You’d have to know how to snub. As it is,
you’re too nice, too sweet, too homey ...
for a ball, I mean.”

I look at her,
my stepmother,
my misfortune, my fate.
Sarcasm shines through
the green glaze of her eyes,
scorn oozes in her words.

“No” she says. “It would be too
adventurous; you’d have to change
into someone else,
the clothes, the dance—
that wouldn’t be you.”

But I yearn to go,
to defy my misfortune.
I yearn to change
into a bewitching butterfly,
put on the magical slippers
and dance,

dance, dance
through my epiphany
until dawn.

Gloria's Yiddish songs

for Gloria and Estelle

Sing, Gloria,
sing to me your childhood songs;
the only memory I have of your world.
I've never been in a shtetl, nor stood
in the gruff clutter of an open market
to see the long-winded merchant sell
geese and flour to the bargaining rabbi
under the shade of flowering lindens.

I've never picnicked in the grassy fields
near the synagogue, nor listened
to the witty fables the sages would tell
while I, suddenly the child in the fable,
dreamy with future plans for distant travels,
look up from the edge of the grass to see
the youngsters dance a hora, watch
their bewitched feet prance faster and faster,
to keep up with the fiddler's fancy impromptus.
I've never been

but in your songs. Pity I can only know
their words in translation. Still
I can see the red taffeta and blue
velvet vest of the merchant, the rabbi's
furry hat, the prayer shawls billowing
like a prediction in the wind, the white lace
of a young girl's petticoat peeks out
as she twirls on her heels, her blushed cheeks
heat with dance. Alive with the chatter
of housewives, the pondering gaze
of a matchmaker, the boasting gossip
of schoolboys, your songs take me there,
take me there where I remember
what was killed in the world.

Author's Note

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Author Biography

Ana Doina, Romanian-born American writer living in New Jersey, left Romania during the Ceausescu regime. Her poems appeared in national and international print and online magazines, and textbooks such as *War, Literature, and the Arts*, *Pinyon Poetry*, *Visions International*, *Poetica*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *California Quarterly*, *Paterson Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *American Diaspora*, *Red White and Blue*, *Teaching Literature in the Twenty-First Century*. She won Honorable Mention in the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Awards for Poems on the Jewish Experience contest in 2007, and two of her poems were nominated for 2002, and 2004 Pushcart Prize.

