

*The Unseen Face of the World*  
By Diana Manole

*The Season of Love*. By Flavia Cosma, Červená Barna Press, 89 pages, \$ 15.00 USD. Translated from Romanian by Flavia Cosma with Charles Siedlecki; <http://www.flaviacosma.com>

In *The Season of Love*, Flavia Cosma attempts to show once again that unseen face of the world only a poet sees and to seek the extraordinary in the ordinary, the clear in the incomprehensible, and the beauty in death and ugliness. She does not bury her emotions in abstract metaphors, but instead re-invents the concreteness of language.

Relevant for her style in this collection of poems, a stereotypical “yard of miracles” is unexpectedly, but wisely transformed into a casual space, where “Among dead apples, / Enchanted birds / Tenderly limp” (“I Lit the Votive Light”). Ordinary details consistently balance a beautified vision of the world and give the poems an everyday tone and contemporary rhetoric. Initially, many images echo past centuries’ poetics, like one verse in the poem “Nocturnal Silence,” which starts with the gentle image “The world dissolves into whispers.” The author, however, consciously chooses this kind of old-fashioned metaphors just to juxtapose them with pragmatic details: “The world dissolves into whispers *as into a swamp*”. Consistently, “our tears drop heavy, / *Trickling onto plates*” (“Dream of Freedom”) and “The mystery covers itself heavily / *With yet another coat*” (“A Whole Month...”).

The inner tension of her images proves the maturity of a poet, who knows her tools well and employs effective strategies that touch the reader without overwhelming. In Cosma’s poems, the world has endless surfaces, seen only by the ones who kept their inner children alive and still strive to catch “The sun’s ray, bouncing on the floor” to answer when “The bird on the fence speaks to us” (“Beginnings”). Thoughts and feelings, objects and beings we thought we knew, reinvent themselves and start acting according to their own rules, borrowing from humans the freedom to do what they want and the power to acknowledge it. Eventually, our surroundings start resembling us, the “earth is covered in wrinkles” (“Pastime”) and clouds “with womanly bodies doze off against the sky” (“Fragments”).

“Switching Shadows” tells us the story of the “symmetry of everyday habits,” which has stopped being a source of spleen and depression like merely a century ago, and has become the source of beauty, waiting to be seen. It is in this poem that Cosma feeds hungry seadogs supper and feels “sentenced to two deaths, / Overlapping, / Interchanging just shadows among themselves, / rhythmically.” Later on, mystery unexpectedly creeps into our homes, where corners uncover “endless depths,” the windows open “to nowhere,” and doors “are forbidden pathways” (“Interior Windows”). In the same manner, the poet reveres the remnants of the past and respectfully tries to bring back to life the forgotten spirits: “Totems, colossal dolls, / Solemn testimonies of lost civilizations, / Lie softly in my unsure hand; / I crush them, scatter them in the wind, / And want to change them into birds / and teach them how to fly” (“Temples”).

To Cosma, poetry itself is like the “little brave bird” that flies over the world in Oscar Wilde’s “The Happy Prince” and rushes back to describe what it has seen. Going along for the flight, the poetic spirit wanders around, speaking in the name of what is speechless, inhabiting a tree to soothe its loneliness, or sacrificing herself for the sake of hungry “Carnivorous flowers.” From one poem to the next, the world’s meanings continuously change, following the moods and the ages of the one who stares back at it. In spite of an active desire to seek beauty, Cosma honestly acknowledges the antinomies of the human condition, the “great anxieties [that] drag us down,” the thirst that drives us to try the “forbidden waters,” and the inherited sins onto which we always “add more, and more yet” (“The Road to Heaven”). Accepting the fate to always remain outside “the common order,” a transparent shadow, a thin soul “suspended, / From threads of cobwebs,” the poet goes through her daily Golgothas without rebelling. Rarely, happiness numbs the restless spirit like “a dead, soft hand”

and being alive or dead becomes only a matter of different points of view.

Cosma then naturally reaches beyond the realm of the living, appropriates the underworld, and makes death the main theme of the second section of *The Season of Love*. Poems progress according to an unsaid, but perceptible order, that helps the reader follow the lyrical trip into the dangerous territory of *not-belonging*. The alleys among “ancient graves” and “finely sculpted angels”, “the dead city”, the vaults and ruins, “a tomb without a name” (“When Happiness...”), and the underground are some of the recurrent places where the discourse of life and death is set. In “The Road to Heaven,” for example, Purgatory itself is revealed as yet another familiar place where the dead “just talk, describing to each other/ How it happened.” In “A Dead Man in the Room,” the lyrical hero has breakfast with a ghostly apparition who goes about his regular chores, “Carrying the dishes to the kitchen--, / Pouring tea for us into glasses.” Instead of posing a threat, death becomes in our “Passing Through Life” just an alternative state, a “deep, blue void,” that does not teach, but simply transforms the travelers “into smoke, / Into thoughtless birds, into song; / [...] into flowers.” It generously releases us back into the natural condition of primitive happiness.

The poet rarely allows herself to long for a retreat, beyond words and time, for “a place known / Only to me, / And where, tired, to fall on my knees / And heal myself / Of living” (“Separate Time”). Most often, however, she denies her own weaknesses and “start[s] living anew” every morning, as one of the many in “the painted crowd” (“A New Life”). As the main means of survival, the poet resorts to loving and praying. God answers her in our hearts. We then let ourselves hear Him and become as vulnerable as the poet. Thankfully, someone like Cosma is here to hold our hands.

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