

Noble Orphan

By Andrea Nicki

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Reviewed by Nayiree Roubinian

I was very excited and pleased to get word of Andrea Nicki's second book of poetry, *Noble Orphan*. I had the opportunity to review her first collection, *Welcoming* (Inanna Press), which provided a wonderful introduction to Nicki's work and left me eager to see the continued evolution of her poetry. Her growth and gift as a writer is evident in her newest collection which touches upon a wide range of important subjects using a poetic style and voice that remains engaging and accessible. Once again, Nicki's words are candid and clear, but her poems also reflect a new depth and maturity in their delivery.

The first section of poems in *Noble Orphan* "Teaching ESL" comes out of Nicki's own experiences as an instructor of English as a Second Language for immigrant women and their children in Vancouver. The mutual and lasting impact felt between Nicki and her students is highlighted as are the challenges and unique struggles for those adapting to a new culture, landscape, and language. Nicki beautifully describes the transformative power of this process in her poem "Chang'e":

make luminous sentences
walk around each ~~words~~ word
~~on~~ in their moon mist
pick one up and keep it
or let it sink back into the earth

A part of the success of *Noble Orphan* is its ability to touch upon and examine broad and diverse topics with insight and sensitivity. The glimpses into issues such as race, gender, class, the natural world, childhood, sexual violence, and relationships, especially among women, are welcome opportunities to reflect and build onto. One example of this was my reading of Nicki's poem "Endangered" which provided a metaphor for our reality as radical activists in the current backlash climate:

Some endangered species
disguise themselves like butterflies
use cryptic coloration
have adapted their colours
over generations
so that they blend in with
dull, bureaucratic environments

Nicki's use of language is also a source of wonder, joy, and immense feeling, describing and producing emotions ranging from the furious to the bittersweet. Many of her short, powerful vignettes leave a lasting impression, including her poem "rage":

after a volcano erupts
grey ash forms curvy clouds
a mystical paisley pattern

rage can be directed into
a sacred form

I was also moved by Nicki's poem "Mary Daly" who she describes as "a triple goddess/poet, philosopher, theologian". Her tribute honoring the impact of Daly's writing echoes an important message for women:

She said every inch of a woman's body is clean
especially there
I had never heard that before
felt a heavy red cloud lift from below

In *Noble Orphan*, Andrea Nicki embodies poetry that is graceful, vivid, and sincere. She grasps language with skill and hones her message effectively. Andrea Nicki's writing reflects on important issues and questions and the channel provided by her poetry leads you to some very significant and imaginative answers.