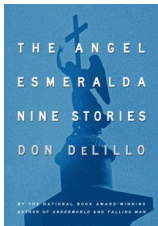


The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories



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The Angel Esmeralda is Don DeLillo's first story collection, and man, can he craft excellent short fiction. Famous for his novels, including *Libra* and *White Noise*, DeLillo's prose is concise, clear, and adept at capturing the inner worlds of his characters. He's obviously not a prolific short story writer because the nine stories span the years from 1979 to 2011. They are set in many locations including: Manhattan, Greece, the Caribbean, a prison camp for wealthy offenders, and a rocket ship in outer space, among others.

My favorite piece is "Midnight in Dostoyevsky." It's about two college students at a wintry, unnamed campus, who love to argue about almost everything, including the big questions of life and a stranger's motivations and unknown family life. At the story's beginning, they start contesting each other's opinions about another pedestrian even while they are passing him. They have a heated and involved dialogue about whether this old man's hooded winter garment is a parka, an anorak, or something else. These arguments aren't just idle chatter. For the two students involved, they put their intellectual and perceptive skills on the line, and being right is vital to their sense of pride.

"Human Moments in World War III" also involved a weird conversational *tÃte-Ã-tÃte* between two astronauts in space. A young scientist and a jaded generalist not only can see the destruction another brutal war is causing on earth, but their space duties are integral to creating more damage and more killings. For DeLillo, communication is the linchpin of all human interactions. With wry humor and characters that exhibit interesting human flaws, the author captures modern life in a series of quirky, bizarre manifestations.

The title story features two nuns who do social work in the tenements of New York City. On the outer walls of one tenement, each time a child dies, someone paints a huge graffiti of the child as an angel. This time, the artist added a sign, "Esmeralda Lopez, 12 Years, Petected in Heven." But Esmeralda isn't that easily vanquished. It's a story about miracles, faith, and how a small murdered child can leave a legacy.

These hot summer days and nights are the perfect time to dip into a short story collection. This one is certainly worth the effort--interesting short fiction by a master writer.

Posted by Dory L. on July 5, 2012

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