

Editor's Notes

I'm pleased to introduce a selection of Katherine Smith's "Fables" for this issue of Folio. "Fables" explores the rich and sometimes painfully complicated journey that is motherhood, one vividly reflected and refracted through the voices of narrators both real and imagined. In these deeply interior poems, Smith reveals the darker shadows of our lives, shining light on the shadows that fall between mothers and their children. Smith's speakers mourn the loss of the autonomous self and pays tribute, too, to the struggles of the child, whose independent journey leads to a destiny beyond the maternal embrace.

In "Why I Am a Realist," the speaker reflects on the ways she has abandoned others to preserve herself—ways that she has strayed from the "maternal." These memories—"leaving a grown man/alone in his apartment in Paris in August" or galloping "a grey horse across dazzling frost" to escape into "winter's world while my mother slept/off the bottle of barbiturates"—soon give way to a darker revelation. "It doesn't matter," the speaker admits, as she considers the forgotten cause that prompted her to drag her thirteen year-old daughter back from a friend's house. "What matters," she insists, is that for three years after/not a dawn rose when I didn't wake knowing/I was a person who could slap a child hard." This new self-knowledge engenders a watchfulness that recalibrates the mother/daughter relationship. Smith's speaker considers this new reality with measured grace, noting that she wouldn't have her daughter forget that protective rage "anymore than I'd have only the pink/of apple blossoms without the undertone/or the pale cream of bowls in a still life by Morandi."

Through the voices of fictionalized mothers—Rebecca, Sarah, Laura, Demeter—we see the ways that practical considerations often put a mother's

desires and ambitions into conflict with her duties. About “Fables,” Katherine Smith writes, “The self—even the mother’s self—has limits, boundaries, borders: between selflessness and unconditional love and self-preservation. Mothers, in small and large ways, push the boundary between these, and, depending on the actual conditions of a woman’s life, crossing the border between self and selflessness can either be blissful or lethal . . . My poems reflect this crossing between the real and the imaginary, self and other, memory and forgetfulness.”

Throughout this powerful and deeply empathetic sequence, we also encounter moments of consolation where the beauty of the natural world inspires a kind of faith, where the baby cradled inside a jacket “on endless walks through past the black swan in the Buttes-Chaumont” now “drives a car through the American suburbs” and “the real flowers/into myth” (“Miracle I”). Elsewhere, a woman sits quietly in the Blue Ridge Mountains, trying to free her mind from “the kind of trouble a woman/who’s raised children on her own can feel.” The timelessness of the mountains inspires a “resoluteness”—“a little more dignity than I came with,” something that “won’t change or break—/no vein of ore, nothing men might obtain/by destruction.” In this momentary peace, she finds emblems of endurance: “the only richness the wind/in wild wheat and the hawks circling above me” (“Woman Alone on the Mountain”).

Katherine Smith’s first book of poetry, *Argument by Design*, was published in 2003. Her poems and prose have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Fiction International*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Natural Bridge*, and *The Laurel Review*. A Tennessean, she currently teaches at Montgomery College in Germantown, Maryland and serves as poetry editor for *The Potomac Review*.

—Jane Satterfield