

Editor's Notes

It's a great pleasure to feature Adrienne Kalfopoulou in this issue of *Folio*.

Adrienne Kalfopoulou lives and teaches in Athens, Greece, and serves as a faculty mentor in Regis University's low residency MFA program. She is the author of three poetry collections, most recently, *A History of Too Much* (Red Hen 2018). Her publications include two essay collections, and several chapbooks, with featured or anthologized work in UK, Canadian, American, Polish, and Greek online and print venues. Recent or forthcoming appearances in *HOTEL*, *The Common*, *Inverted Syntax*, *Slag Glass City*, and *Writers and Their Mothers*.

Kalfopoulou's verse is widely admired for its matchless fusion of sensuous beauty and historical perspective. Poet and essayist Debra Marquart has praised Kalfopoulou's unique ability to "navigate[s] themes of exile, war, perpetual homesickness and the complex histories of family and country." Reflecting on Kalfopoulou's most recent collection, *A History of Too Much* (Red Hen, 2018) which centers on the Greek financial crisis, poet and critic Cynthia Hogue finds a "powerful lyric testimony to the courage, humor, and brave resistance with which ordinary people faced augurs of loss in Greece." In this selection, readers will encounter poems of formal rigor and expressive lyricism: a body of verse that reveals this poet's affinity with literary mother Sylvia Plath as well as her kinship with the specifically female tradition of politically committed vision embodied in Muriel Rukeyser's oeuvre.

Kalfopoulou's poems are deeply grounded in domestic settings; these familiar spaces of dailiness open onto broader vistas and reveal complex histories. In "My Daughter's Eyes," the speaker contemplates the right words to answer her child's questions about parental separation. Within her daughter's gaze, the speaker locates the richly colored reflections of the familial heritage that shape her child's life—one that crosses global terrain from "deep Aegean velvets that lap/the jagged shorelines of so much discord, so much/

fevered history” to her “father’s orphaned, barefoot escape,/a Smyrnian memory.” Here, as elsewhere, the poet turns an unflinching eye on the challenges of motherhood, noting the distances that accrue in the language a mother and her child share: a daughter will “ask for the world whole,” while her mother “can only translate so much.” Kalfopoulou’s poems are particularly revelatory for the unsentimental descriptions of exile and the attendant desire to belong; they probe connections between lived reality and myth (“Refusing to be Demeter”).

The links between personal and broader cultural history are vividly documented in “Are You Listening?” where a family’s traumatic history of exile and escape is set against the larger cultural backdrop of international conflict (“Saigon. Phnom Penh. Jakarta./Countries of emerald leaves, the breadfruit trees. . .”). As conversation between the speaker and her mother unfolds, it becomes clear that the father’s work in “dangerous places” and his wife’s efforts to shield her children from the violence of war have left a dark legacy. As past and present intertwine, the poet is transported from the inconveniences of the current moment to “the bullet-marked walls, inside/the back bedroom where war was not meant to reach.”

Writing about trauma is never simple; it requires writers to achieve an emotional balance and to construct a clear narrative of troubling and chaotic events. Kalfopoulou’s poems frequently adopt formal structures to accomplish these goals. “Mute as Lawns Nobody Dares to Walk Across” showcases her technical mastery and keen awareness of intergenerational communication. The interlocking lines that define the form here recreate the uncanny logic of trauma, tracing the circular nature of conversation between the speaker and the mother—one that accommodates a range of characters as well as frequent shifts in time and place. The poem is a powerful testament to the discomfiting truth known to generations of mothers and daughters: a painful heritage will make ordinary conversation fraught; healing may be a lifetime’s work.

Kalfopoulou pays special attention to the challenges faced by mothers raising children on their own as they negotiate the competing demands of maternal duties and the desire for personal fulfillment. The speaker of “Growing” merges poetic composition with her daily chores, admitting:

. . . it will take all of my strength
to get through the bath hour, reading Babar,
the talk of hair and how and if we will braid it,
tomorrow’s homework review....

“A White Horse,” meanwhile, portrays obstacles in love as the speaker’s partner “struggles with the idea of my child/the difficulty of loving me with her.” At the same time, the poet is drawn to moments of joy, as in “Cherries,”

where a mother and daughter share a bowl of fruit, eating them “pits and all”:

as if these fat-skinned jewels came
straight from God, as if
no other berry matched this
sun-filled sweetness.

Poet and translator Alike Barnstone observes that Kalfopoulou’s writing “takes us beyond the whitewash into the heart of Greek culture . . . and creates a map of the contradictory Greek psyche.” Kalfopoulou’s verse lovingly charts the contradictions implicit in mothering; her comments offer a lively glimpse into her artistic process and I’m glad to include them below.

—Jane Satterfield

A Lineage of Silence

“As I put these poems together I saw themes, obsessions, repetitions: a tension between yearnings, the demands of parenthood, in my case single-parenthood, and overriding circumstances. But there were inheritances, too, a lineage of silence, subjects avoided, left unvoiced as in “Mother Tongue”, “Mute As Lawns Nobody Dares Walk Across” and “Are you Listening?” — in the silences were the complications, of unrequited nurture most obviously, for what feeds/constructs a self or fails to. In this the violences of the patriarchy are implicated. I think of H el ene Cixous’ words from “The Laugh of the Medusa”: “Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts.” Many of the poems engage with loss, all speak to a conflicted response to motherhood — themes include *eros*, absence, sacrifice, failure. “The Border” conflates the idea of the body as permeable and so vulnerable, to the circumstances of an economic migrant, a young mother forced to leave her children behind, the border suggestive of state-patrolled boundaries as well as how these, as with the body, can be violated. What is passed down in the matrilineal? A silence as much as a yearning, fraught doublings of the domestic and public, inheritances in an economy of nurture that continues to privilege the desires of men over those of women; fissures that produced poems.”

—Adrienne Kalfopoulou

Adrienne Kalfopoulou’s blog posts, reviews, sample work & rants can be found @ www.adriannekalfopoulou.com.