

EDITORIAL:

Echoes from the Antipodes

by *Theodora Patrona*

I come from a world of the greatest of storytellers. We are a storytelling culture. Some of the most important, oldest, richest and ever-lasting epic law stories belong to the Aboriginal culture of this land. -Alexis Wright

Echoes online literary magazine issue 14 titled *Echoes from the Antipodes* consists of a gamut of creative responses on a wide spectrum of narratives –textual, visual and audio-taught in the course “Oceanic Texts and Culture(s)” during the last three academic years (2021-2024). The student works published here are diverse, colorful and vibrant, often combining the textual and the visual and include collages, short stories, poems and a fairy tale. As multilayered, polyphonic and contemporary works of art crafted by the senior school students, these creative pieces “reveal complex interpretive insights” (Knoeller 48) of the material discussed. They simultaneously foreground the young artists’ own reflections on colonialist violence and exploitation, racism and marginalization but also resilience, belonging and affective ties, all grafted upon contemporary Greek reality.

Ian Reid’s discussion on “any act of reading as being itinerant” mentions “a movement that is both spatial and temporal”, “a sense of passage” and a “terminus” (16). As itinerant travelers of Australian literature¹ on a quest for the elusive concept of Australian identity, the students move through three main areas: white (Anglo-Irish) Australian authors from the early settler days until the 21st century postmodern novel as well as Aboriginal and migrant writings. In more detail, Anglo-Irish writings are imbued with the recurring motifs that have haunted the Australian collective consciousness as regards the physical, mythical and ideological space identified as Australia. This unique and life-changing *chora*² shapes characters (fictional and non-fictional) forging values and traits like endurance, inventiveness, individualism and companionship, while it may also breed depravity, violence, suffering and annihilation (physical or emotional) often interlinked with diachronic colonialist practices. Aboriginal narratives serve as pleas for justice and Christian humanity in the earlier times, or calls for political activism and solidarity in the mid-twentieth century, and even acknowledgement and

¹ For an intriguing and recent consideration of Australian literature see *The Routledge Companion to Australian Literature* edited by Jessica Gildersleeve.

² The term here is applied echoing both Aristotelean and Kristevan connotations

never-ending shame³ in more recent years. As late comers in Australia, migrant authors may lament the loss of home and express a range of feelings depending on their proximity to the trauma of migration: anger and displacement, nostalgia and the dream of return, frustration and bewilderment as regards the ethnic identity, further complicated by the parameters of race, class and gender.

Writing about these texts for students has additionally been an itinerant experience to rely again upon Reid's text, "going on through and between the lines", [f]rom then to now. From there to here. From beginnings to middles and ends" (16). As they dive into the depths of their readings, students pick from the treasures of the texts, discard, keep and secure what they consider valuable for their 21st century standards, literary tastes and experiences. Satisfied with their findings, they feast on them: interweave and reshape, add color and voice, breathe new life onto them producing brand new creations they can call their own. The themes that they have chosen are multifarious. Distinctive natural beauty, colonialist ravages, capitalist injustice and revolt percolate in the works of Evdoxia Theodorou, Anisa Rozani and Odysseas Panatsias's art. As the public becomes personal, the journey to young womanhood, the shackles of patriarchy and the celebration of female physicality are at the core of Marianna Marmaridou, Eleni Maria Argyriou and Georgia Kalampouka's works. Cultural memory and the mother-daughter relationship⁴, as well as the broader concept of violence and the need to separate from one's mother/mother culture/mother tongue provide food for thought for Zoe Tsiakta and Savvina Moutafidou respectively. The tormenting questions of belongingness and the quest of self-identification in migrant daughters suffuse the characters in Nefeli Soel-Spandoni's and Rosa Lillian Cook's short stories.

In more detail, Evdoxia Theodorou's collage "Australia: History's Invisible Woman" initiates this series of literary pieces with a polyphonic poetic and photographic creation, cutting, pasting and commenting on excerpts from some of the most prominent white Australian literary figures like Henry Lawson and Mary Gilmore. Theodorou's clippings from these Australian literary staples that describe life in Australia from the early times of colonization

³ For an interesting approach to contemporary national shame for acts against Aboriginals see Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, the chapter "Shame before Others".

⁴ Elaborating on the mother daughter relationship within the Greek Australian context Antigone Kefala, the prominent Greek Australian novelist, considers it as a 'lifelong, fluid dialogue or exchange, forming a fundamental, everyday matrix to our lives, that gives us attitudes to life, evaluations, social formations and so on.' (in Nickas 7).

unravel the allegorical story of a woman Theodorou calls Australia. Theodorou's collage stresses the latter's strong ties with the land, the contrasting perceptions of Australia by white settlers, as either heavenly or barren, the violations and abuse Australia has had to endure by those who are unappreciative of her charms. Theodorou concludes by discerning the loss of Australia, the Aboriginal one and the birth of a new Australia, to satisfy and serve the plans of the Western settlers.

In a similar vein, unraveling the battle between Aboriginal life and colonialist conquer through her yarn, Anisa Rozani resorts to the fairy tale genre with her tale "A Siren's Song". Building on the all-powerful myth of the siren, Australia's oceanic surroundings and white Australian novelists and poets like Peter White, A.D. Hope and Catherine Spence, Rozani comes up with a tale that also exploits the potential of the visual. At the center she places a mesmerizing female sea creature that, as a reflection of Aboriginality, attracts the attention of the pirate-colonizer. Their deadly brief encounter ends with the doom of both: he kills her with his brutality but he is simultaneously killed by her as he drowns in a sea of ignorance and guilt for her sufferings.

As the colonialists continue in their struggle to tame nature well into the 20th century Australian history, Odysseas Panatsias's evocative collages titled "Black Mountains" and "The Knife" oscillate between the breathtaking and seemingly inexhaustible natural beauties of this continent and the sugar cane workers' inhumane exploitation to multiply capitalist profits. With two of the most prominent modernist female texts as his springboard Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* and Eve Langley's *The Pea Pickers* Panatsias's collages harmoniously combine image, and diction, both from the novels as well as his own and reverberate with the concerns of the Australian socialist realist novel.

Devanny, Langley and Stead have a noteworthy position in the next section with Marianna Marmaridou, Eleni Maria Argyriou and Georgia Kalampouka diverging and adding the key parameter of gender in their examination of issues of female self-definition and struggles against patriarchy while celebrating womanhood. For Marmaridou, the texts become a stepping stone for her reflections on the female body and sexuality, gender restrictions, oppression and female solidarity. Imbuing her collage with feminist theory, Argyriou appreciates the centrality of personal space and a room of one's own, emphasized in Christina Stead's novel *For Love Alone*. For Argyriou, writing seems to serve as the safety zone of her heroine. This leads to an interweaving of diverse female voices of the primary

texts and the poet's own, supplemented with images in what becomes "a ritual of self-exploration and meditation taking place in the secrecy of a room". Female conditioning is at the heart of Kalampouka's poem "Festering Hope" which is based on A. D. Hope's "Australia". Through the extended metaphor of playing the piano, Kalampouka ponders over female oppression, oscillating between feelings of injustice and bitterness, ending with the inkling of hope for a future of female liberation and free agency.

The two following works by Zoe Tsiakta and Savvina Moutafidou unreel Aboriginality and in particular the prominence of the mother-daughter bond. Tsiakta's poem celebrates affective ties through physicality and cultural practices of remembrance and includes frequent Aboriginal tropes and demands like the vital link with nature, social injustice, memory and cultural identity. Also drawing inspiration from the mother-daughter connection, Moutafidou breaks away from the liminalities of time and space of the primary text that triggered her work and weaves it with her own distinctive voice and the voices of the Greek author Vasilis Alexakis, the prominent French thinker Luce Irigaray, but also the renowned Canadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip. Furthermore, Moutafidou makes a point about the common ground of violence between archiving the albums of unknown relatives the daughter in her story is forced to make, mothering a child and making a mother out of a woman. She therefore creates an intricate and original piece on bonding and severing ties, remembering and forgetting.

Migrant and Aboriginal questions of identity and belongingness upon Australian soil come together in the two final short stories of this issue. Nefeli Soel- Spandoni's beautiful artwork frames her short story titled "Whose land?", a piece that was instigated by Oodgeroo Noonuccal's powerful poem "We Are Going" (1964). As Soel-Spandoni explains the lines "We are strangers here now, but the white tribe are // the strangers" (9-10) prompted her into attempting to place them within a contemporary urban Australian context. Her heroines are two teenage girls in Melbourne of Aboriginal and Afghan background, who feel alienated from their ancestral heritage but have been labelled as the Other, given their racial and cultural background. As the author juxtaposes the stories of the two girls she pinpoints their similar dead-ends, a cultural and existential state of limbo, with suspicion and discrimination as the common denominators. This issue comes full circle with Rosa Lillian Cook's short story titled "Apples and Oranges" inspired by Maria Katsonis's memoir *The Good Greek Girl*. Narrated from the daughter's perspective, Cook's story revolves around the sacrifices that the migrant mother was often forced to make. While she focuses on her daughter's care, the Greek mother embodies the shattered dreams of an artistic career as a ceramist in

Australia, aspirations that were replaced by a life of hard toil, assimilation and sacrifice for the offspring. The mother's contact with Indigenous ceramics and this fortunate cross-cultural exchange strengthens her connection with the soil and the original inhabitants of a land she still feels a foreigner in but she realizes she is not alone in her feelings of displacement. Like Soel-Spandoni before her, Cook envisages multicultural Australian society and literature as an amalgam of diverse narratives of hope and sacrifice, exile and belonging, an echo from the Antipodes that ultimately reverberates from all ten works in this issue.

Works Cited

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