

Reflection on “Apples and Oranges”

by

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“Apples and Oranges” was inspired by Maria Katsonis’ *The Good Greek Girl*, particularly the line: “I now wonder how she coped; I wonder what she gave up to have a life with him, this woman who read Simone de Beauvoir in French and English.” This sentence struck a chord for me reminding me of the struggles of women, and especially migrant women and mothers¹ who sacrificed their dreams for the sake of their children’s futures. While this is not an autobiographical piece, it draws immense inspiration from my own mother. Though she has not migrated to a different land, she was an incredibly talented ceramist whose circumstances forced her to abandon her art in favour of a more stable income to support her family. Her quiet sacrifices, creativity, and resilience are deeply woven into the fabric of this story and myself.

The story reflects the experiences of many migrant mothers to Australia, who, like my protagonist, traded dreams of artistic and intellectual fulfilment for survival and stability. This tension between hope and sacrifice is a recurring theme in Australian literature, especially in the narratives of migrants struggling to assimilate in a country where they felt unwanted². The mother’s hands, which once shaped clay into works of art, now perform repetitive tasks, peeling fruit and sewing to make ends meet. Her dreams live on in the blue-glazed pots she brought from Greece, bittersweet reminders of what could have been. This balance of creation and loss mirrors the broader migrant experience in Australia, where personal aspirations are often overshadowed by the need to assimilate and survive.

The story also engages with themes of Indigenous history, which are central to Australian literature. The mother's encounter with Indigenous women in pottery workshops³ highlights an important cross-cultural exchange. Through their teachings, she gains an understanding of the spiritual and cultural significance of clay in Indigenous traditions, an insight that deepens her connection to the country even as she feels alienated from it. This experience strengthens her connection to the land while also reminding her of her position as a migrant in a land already torn from its original inhabitants. These moments highlight how Australia's layered histories continue to shape both migrant and Indigenous narratives.

At its heart, *Apples and Oranges* is an exploration of maternal sacrifice, displacement, and the unspoken bonds that connect women across generations. The fruits—apples and oranges—serve as metaphors for these sacrifices and as symbols of cultural hybridity: the familiar oranges of her homeland and the apples of her new life. Their unspoken exchange reflects the complexity of understanding between mother and daughter—a reconciliation that does not require words but is deeply felt.

By drawing on both personal inspiration and broader themes of migration and Indigenous histories, the story seeks to honour the resilience of women like my mother, whose sacrifices commonly go unnoticed and unappreciated. It serves as a reminder of the quiet strength of women who create opportunities for others at great personal cost and of the need to bridge generational gaps with empathy and understanding. While the sacrifices of the past have shaped the opportunities of the present, this reflection calls for a future where such choices no longer come at the expense of individual dreams.



Image: Kungkarrangkalpa (Seven Sisters) 2014 by Angilyiya Tjapiti Mitchell, Papulankutja. Artists © the artist/Copyright Agency 2020 Image: National Museum of Australia

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Endnotes

Echoes- Issue 14-Echoes from the Antipodes

¹ For more on the migrant woman's experience in Australia see Sheridan.

² On the racism experienced by non-British migrants after World War 2, see Jacobowitz; for more information specifically on Greek migration see Tamis 33-61.

³ See Collet and McKenzie for more on pottery workshops and the significance of clay.