

# DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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## Baby Watching

Oct 26, 2009 10:59AM

His charcoal-blue eyes burn for knowledge,  
they sift the world in fragments,  
between the bars of the cot he sees half a mother,  
her hand reaching the door knob  
again her silent escape when the music still plays  
those ponderous notes  
– the room now holds one breath,  
he can turn this into a cry and bring her back,  
he can turn over and stop destiny's growth,  
he can search among the room's shadows  
which one holds the map, the puzzle, the key?

The things he's supposed to know –  
the sounds have all walked away,  
the sobbing, the snoring, talking in loud whispers,  
all the clues to find love –  
above his head, the cot is pasted like a prison cell,  
the rainbow spider sways in and out of the bars,  
the bed which holds the midnight tangle  
is boxed and waiting, the curtains allow daylight  
one step in, the mirror finds another baby,  
this one is smaller with eyes ready to gulp  
the room's slightest tremble, any sign of her return?

The mirror's blankets begin to fight like starving animals,  
he watches a mouth tear out its lungs  
and make a sound slashing the room's contents  
away from the teddy bear cuddles,  
big shadows have marched in, carrying scissors and forceps,  
now he must cry louder than his double  
for her heart to break in, rock him back to liquid love,  
he stops – there is that smell to melt all shadows,  
her arms, her breasts, the perfect bed.

(First published in *Malleable Jangle*, online literary journal and in poetry collection *Honey and Salt*, Five Islands Press 2007.)

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- Calliope's Final Story
- The Blood Rose and the Artichoke Heart
- George - A happening on an Australian beach
- Distraught beyond Description
- Anthropomorphic visions of god

## The Blood Rose and the Artichoke Heart

Sep 22, 2009 01:55AM

*(for my Grandfather, Pappou Angeli)*

Epping: 20 stations too far from the city,  
where trains screech, *The end of the line!*  
(passengers prefer not to get off)  
where factory workers starve,  
where paddocks harvest wild thistles, horned weeds  
(daisy-fed cows are extinct)  
snakes graze, skinks bask, flies pester in gangs,  
where I scramble in towering, tough grass  
straggling behind *Pappou's* haste  
behind his will to capture the hearts and limbs  
of every artichoke daring to raise its head  
above his scraggy-pup, whining granddaughter.

*Pappou th-e boro, Pappou I'm tired*  
my body fixes on excuses  
*Pappou toilette, Pappou*  
knotting my legs tighter than shoelaces  
*Pappou teleeoresee, Pappou!*  
I'll miss *Neighbours* with *Charlene*  
and her easy way with English  
but grass turns to blue as I slump into sobs  
wishing artichokes would go back  
to *Pappou's* foreign land.  
*Pappou* is swishing and swerving  
dancing the wind  
dropping his jaw he sings:  
*Etsee een ee-zoe, kai pos na teen alaxees*  
*pos na teen xerapees me moleevee kai hartee*  
hacking air with a chicken knife  
ghosts fall at his feet  
*alle klaine, kai alle yellane thilathee.*  
Spiky flowers line up  
not daring to jig  
they've been waiting patiently  
*anginares moo, my artichokes,*  
holding them like a lost beloved,  
their prickles are his delight.

I hold two buckets and he a third  
while he performs a murderous embrace  
with one arm and a sharpened blade  
he croons unswerving love.  
*Mia fora kai yio, eeba na feeyo*  
*abo toos kaeimoos, yia na xefeeyo...*  
*...in my village of sweetness and light*  
*there was a girl not that much older than you*  
*krata moo to hairee, krata to barabono moo...*  
*...one day you'll learn*  
*carobs she plucked from trees*

*squeezing their juice  
the sweet smell of blood rose  
the savoury trail of artichoke heart  
our honey and salt...  
...krata teen karthia soo os boo nartee to broee.*

I have no hanky for his eyes,  
I have no words to soothe.  
*Pappou* has no time to linger  
there are crowns to be guillotined  
there's one bucket empty of heads;  
*Pappou* continues this easy war  
he's now cornered the big one  
the crown of all thorns  
the most sorrowful hearted  
*anginara moo, my artichoke,*  
saliva running as hungry as memory.  
*I packed my yearnings, left my regrets,*  
*she stood at the doorway refusing to wave...*  
when his *Mama* tucked him into her warmth  
feeding him the growth of her land  
butterfly kissing his stabs of hunger.

For its biggest blessing  
he raises his knife to the heavens,  
I wait for blinding light, electric storm, rain  
but a scream drenches all weeds,  
like a plane, he crashes,  
red roses spread over his arms,  
the knife his embattled betrayer,  
*anginara moo, my artichoke...*  
*Pappou's* song hobbling into prayer  
on his knees, ankle to stem, blood mingling

*Pappou? Pappou*

— his eyes my mirrors  
my hand grasps for the strong fingers  
— lighter than petals in the wind.

(From poetry collection **Honey and Salt**, Five Islands Press 2007)



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#### Related Posts:

- Baby Watching
- The Terracotta Woman
- Helen
- The House Next To The Rose Tree
- Stopover in Dubai

## Calliope's Final Story

Sep 14, 2009 12:38AM

*(for my paternal and maternal grandmothers)*

Long ago, we grew babies like markets stock fruit  
so many, splendid, ripe, bruised.  
A mother nursed her garden from bed,  
five cots, if lucky, for eight or nine.  
One bosom became the village well □  
a wandering creek or waterfall  
suddenly escaped our flesh,  
a steady river gushed into a suckling mouth  
□ to silence twelve cries, and then more  
when the neighbour's wife went missing.

We named them after patron saints  
to please eternal life and stop it from snatching  
until their bodies were ringed like trees  
so ready to sigh away.

We knew the story before it was told  
from grandma to mother to us  
of one, two, so unfair, if more  
wrapped in dark night's blanket  
taken by sleep traveller to its side of the moon.

If traveller was an angel,  
my baby was blessed.

If traveller was the vampire,  
baby's baptism dress was buried  
under a cross twice its size.

If traveller wore gypsy clothes,  
I would pray baby a better life.

My grandma lost three,  
mother streamed luck, only the one:  
little sister dream-kissed our cheeks  
then flew into her angel's wings.  
My seven grew into five,  
the two curves of my heart are missing...  
some memories, like some babies, clutch stronger than others.

(First published in Wet Ink, Western Australian literary journal,  
and in poetry collection Honey and Salt, Five Islands Press 2007)

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- Baby Watching
- George - A happening on an Australian beach
- PUSSY WILLOW TREE
- Distraught beyond Description
- A Lonely Life