Worldly interiors in the Fiction of Antigone Kefala

Author:
McMahon, Elizabeth

Publication details:
Antigone Kefala: New Australian Modernities
Chapter no. 3
pp. 51 - 68
9781760802028 (ISBN)

Publication Date:
2021-08

New Australian Modernities

ANTIGONE
KEFALA

New Australian Modernities

Edited by
Elizabeth McMahon
and Brigitta Olubas

UWA PUBLISHING

First published in 2021 by
UWA Publishing
Crawley, Western Australia 6009
www.uwap.uwa.edu.au

UWAP is an imprint of UWA Publishing
a division of The University of Western Australia

ISBN: 978-1-76080-202-8

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

Front cover image Virginia Wallace-Crabbe; back cover image Warwick Hatton.
Typeset in 12 point Bembo
Printed by McPherson's Printing Group

Contents

Contributors

Anna Couani is a Sydney writer and visual artist who runs The Shop Gallery in the inner Sydney suburb of Glebe with husband, sculptor Hilik Mirankar. She has known Antigone Kefala since the 1980s. Her most recent books are *Thinking Process* (2017) and *Small Wonders* (2012). *Local* is forthcoming in 2021. She has been involved in small literary presses, The Poets Union and the No Regrets women writers workshop. She co-edited *Telling Ways* with Sneja Gunew, *Minute to Midnight* (writing about peace and disarmament), *Island in the Sun* prose anthologies and *To End all Wars*, and edited the chapbook *Falling Angels* for Cordite.

Konstandina Dounis is a cultural historian with a particular interest in marginalised voices. Greek-Australian literature, history and culture has been the axis around which her research has revolved. Her publications entail extensive forays into unearthing immigrant women's narratives, examining their propensity to challenge canonical formations, to enrich historical documentation and to widen the parameters of their diasporic community. She is a literary translator, from Modern Greek to English, and has an extensive list of publications in this regard. She teaches in the Faculty of Education at Monash University and is an academic facilitator for the Monash Education Academy.

Jane Gibian is a poet and librarian whose new collection of poetry, *Beneath the Tree Line*, will be published by Giramondo in 2021. She was awarded a Varuna Poetry Flagship Fellowship for 2020. Her work has been anthologised most recently in *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (Puncher and Wattman) and *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry* (Hunter).

Sneja Gunew (FRSC) is Professor Emerita of English and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She has taught in the UK, Australia and Canada. She has published widely on multicultural, postcolonial and feminist critical theory and is the author of *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (1994) and *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (2004). She has also edited and co-edited eleven books. Based in Canada since 1993, her current work is on comparative multiculturalisms and diasporic literatures and their intersections with national and global cultural formations. Her most recent book is titled *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017).

Efi Hatzimanolis is a poet, writer and independent scholar working in the areas of cultural and textual criticism with a particular interest in the intersections between identity politics and representation. Her critical essays on cultural and gender differences in writing are published in a number of journals and books while her short stories are published in the anthologies *Mothers from The Edge* (Owl Publishing, 2006), and *Fathers from the Edge* (Owl Publishing, 2015). Her poetry is published in *Southern Sun*, *Aegean Light* (Arcadia, 2011) and the chapbook *Nature Lover* (Owl, 2019), the latter drawing on poems that first appeared in draft form in the collaborative *Project 365*.

Ivor Indyk is head of Giramondo Publishing, and Whitlam Professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University. He was the founding editor of *Heat* and co-founder of the *Sydney Review of Books*. He has written on many aspects of Australian literature, art, architecture and literary publishing.

Vrasidas Karalis is Sir Nicholas Laurantus Professor of Modern Greek and Chair of the Modern Greek Department at the University of Sydney. For the last twenty years his main area of research has been in Modern Greek, Byzantine and Cultural Studies and more recently New Testament Studies. He also worked in translation, especially of

Patrick White, and has translated three of White's major works into Greek (*Voss*, *The Vivisector*, *A Cheery Soul*). His most recent books include *The Glebe Point Road Blues In Prose and Verse* (2019) and *Realism in Greek Cinema: From the Post-War Period to the Present* (2017).

Kate Livett is an educator and researcher who has published extensively on Australian women's writing, most recently on Helen Garner's *The Children's Bach* (*Southerly* 2019) and on 'Coloniality and Gender in Neo-Gothic Australian novels' (in *Neo-Gothic Narratives* 2020). She taught in the School of Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales for fifteen years and is a learning designer for NSW TAFE. She was fiction and non-fiction reviews editor of *Southerly* journal (2012–18).

Angelo Loukakis is an Australian author who has also worked as a teacher, editor, book publisher and scriptwriter. He has been a member of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, was founding chair of the NSW Writers' Centre, and between 2010 and 2015 executive director of the Australian Society of Authors. He is the author of three novels: *Messenger*, *The Memory of Tides* and *Houdini's Flight*; two collections of short stories, *For the Patriarch* and *Vernacular Dreams*; and a number of non-fiction works. His short stories and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies, while his collection *For the Patriarch* won a NSW Premier's Literary Award in 1981. In 2010 he gained a doctorate in creative arts from University of Technology Sydney.

Elizabeth McMahon is professor of English at UNSW. She researches and publishes in Australian Literary Studies, Women's and Gender Studies and Island Studies, and her monograph *Islands and the Literary Imagination* (2016) won two national awards. She has edited journals for twenty-five years, including *Australian Humanities Review* (1997–2008) and *Southerly* (from 2008), and with Brigitta Olubas has edited three books on Australian literature and culture. Recent publications include essays on Jessica Anderson's *The Impersonators* (PublicBooks.org 2020),

Australia's grotesque imaginary (*JASAL* 2020), Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* (Sydney University Press 2021) and an interview with Helen Garner (noveldialogue.org 2021).

Brigitta Olubas is professor of English at UNSW. She has published widely in Australian Literary Studies with a particular focus on migrant and refugee writing. Her work on Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains* has been published in *JASAL* and PublicBooks.org. She is the authorised biographer of Shirley Hazzard (forthcoming, Virago/Farrar Straus & Giroux 2022) and edited Hazzard's *Collected Stories* (Virago/Farrar Straus & Giroux 2020) and *Selected Essays* (Columbia University Press 2016), after publishing the first scholarly monograph (Cambria 2012) and edited collection (Sydney University Press 2014) on Hazzard. She is a former editor of *JASAL* and, with Elizabeth McMahon, has edited three further books on Australian literature and culture.

Penelope Stavrou is a PhD candidate at UNSW and has recently submitted a doctoral thesis titled 'Re-defining yourself in some other terms': Reading/Weaving Self, Space and Art in the Oeuvre of Antigone Kefala. This thesis is the first study of Kefala's complete prose oeuvre.

Emeritus Professor **Michael Tsianikas** was born in Greece. He studied Greek literature at the University of Thessaloniki and completed his PhD in France, where he also taught in secondary education. He moved to Australia in 1987, based first at the University of Sydney and then Flinders University in 1989. He has published eight scholarly monographs and edited many volumes in the field of Greek Studies. He has convened nineteen international conferences in the areas of Greek Studies and on the theme of aging in a foreign land. In 2010 he was a founder of LOGOS: Australian Centre for Hellenic Language and Culture. He is working on a new monograph while also hiking passionately.

Introduction

Elizabeth McMahon and Brigitta Olubas

Antigone Kefala is one of the most significant of the Australian writers who have come from elsewhere; it would be difficult to overstate the significance of her life and work in the culture of this nation. Over the last half-century, her poetry and prose have reshaped and expanded Australian literature and prompted us to re-examine its premises and capacities. From the force of her poetic imagery and the cadences of her phrases and her sentences to the large philosophical and historical questions she poses and to which she responds, Kefala has generated in her writing new ways of living in time, place and language. Across six collections of poetry and five prose works, themselves comprising fiction, non-fiction, essays and diaries, she has mapped the experience of exile and alienation alongside the creativity of a relentless reconstitution of self. Kefala is also a cultural visionary. From her

rapturous account of Sydney as the place of her arrival in 1959, to her role in developing diverse writing cultures at the Australia Council, to the account of her own writing life amongst a community of friends and artists in *Sydney Journals: Reflections 1970–2000* (2008), she has reimagined the ways we live and write in Australia.

Kefala is an eloquent and compelling writer on the subjectivity of the migrant writer, and her work helps define our understanding of what writing from outside a language and culture involves and generates. Her background defies accommodation within any simple rubric of migrant or refugee. Of Greek background, her family had lived for three generations in Romania. They returned to Greece shortly after World War II, and the adolescent Antigone thus had to relearn Greek; it joined French and Romanian in her linguistic repertoire. She has observed that the ability to speak several languages was simply expected in the circles in which she grew up: 'In Romania at that time, as I think in most parts of Europe, a second or third language was considered an intrinsic part of one's education, something that could only enhance one's understanding of other cultures, and provide direct access to valuable intellectual resources' ('Towards a Language' 22). In Greece the family lived in refugee camps run by the International Refugee Organization. They applied to come to Australia, were rejected, and migrated instead to New Zealand in 1951. Kefala said that living in Wellington, New Zealand, 'utterly changed all our perceptions of ourselves, all suppositions. There were enormous problems. We had to relearn attitudes to life, to thinking. Living was difficult' (Digby 32).

After completing university in Wellington, Kefala moved to Sydney where she began writing. She wrote in English: 'I feel you have to live in a language to be able to write in it, and … I couldn't write in Romanian or Greek or French because they were languages that I had somehow passed through. English was the language I was actually living in – imperfectly!' (33). She has always drawn attention to the attenuation of her place in English,

because of the complex ways that literary and other cultural, linguistic, psychological and historical influences and inflections are absorbed by each person. There is also the more intimate matter of individual psychology: 'My approach to English is not quite an English approach. The kind of imagery that I use, the kind of vocabulary that I use, the whole texture of my language is not an English texture' (33). This point is reinforced by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas in the introduction to their rich and timely 2013 compendium of articles, reviews and interviews about and with Kefala. They observe that while Kefala wrote in English '(the lingua franca of Australia), … the English that she employed in her writing was not the English that Anglo-Australia was used to hearing or reading' (11). Moving across languages, as so many migrant and refugee writers have done, alerts these writers – and their readers – to the multiplicitous and polysemic nature of language; to its otherness, and to the opacity with which language represents experience and the world.

This knotty location in language folds out into the complex relationship that exists between Kefala's work and the mainstreams of Australian literature: from her first publication, *The Alien* (1973), she has worked alongside, outside, between, around and against more visible and voluble currents. Her subject matter is often at odds with mainstream Australian culture, informed, perhaps, by something akin to the sense that her protagonist Alexei describes in 'The First Journey': 'some foreignness in me from the beginning' (37). She explained in an interview, 'In English, people don't like to write seriously about death in the European sense, or the Greek sense … I have been told for many, many years, and constantly, that I am not of this place' (Digby 34). At times, this disconnection is expressed through a sure sense of comedy, such as in *The Island*, set in New Zealand, when the protagonist Melina returns from university and tells her aunt that 'the nature of the understatement was more miraculous and more subtle than the Pindaric ode' *(The Island* 23). At other times the gap between cultures is more alienating, more

violently inscribed in the protagonist's experience, as here, from Melina again:

> I spoke. I could see from his face that he had not the faintest idea what he was saying, the meaning stopped somewhere mid-air between us, he incredulous that he will ever understand me, I incredulous that he will ever understand me … I could see in his whole attitude the immense surprise at being confronted here in his own room, at the University, by something as foreign as myself. (22)

Here the satiric tone flips back on itself to confront us with the shock of that final statement, which is surely the condition of the migrant or refugee, the self who is forced to see themself as other: 'something as foreign as myself'.

That foreignness itself determines a response to Australia that is at its heart aesthetic, grounded in a poet's apprehension but also in representational traditions of European modernism. Kefala writes of her arrival in Australia in 1959:

> … we entered Sydney harbour on a summer morning. The colours of the rock wall at The Gap were warm apricot, the sun was coming down on the waters, the whole landscape shimmering, overflowing with light, with heat, with movement … My past in Romania, in Greece came back as a meaningful experience in a landscape that had similar resonances. Sydney seemed alive with people, activity and intellectual excitement. ('Towards a Language' 27)

While much of this activity and excitement were to be generated by Kefala and the circles of writers and artists that quickly formed, there was also a sense at this time that

> Australia … was very interested in discovering itself. Books about Australia were everywhere. I felt that I too could take

> part in this. The landscape was already feeling familiar, allowing me to survive; the landscape was more at ease with itself, more generous in its attitude. Indifferent, maybe, but on a large scale, the scale allowed for more imaginative potential. (27)

This sense of the vitality of a lived and living Australia, and a landscape known from other lives, proposes a very different orientation to the landscape from, for instance, the familiar colonial picture, mediated through 'weird melancholy', isolation, desolation. It is an apprehension that leads Kefala to write, surprising herself, as she observed, 'that I had finally found a voice, at the beginning terribly pleased with my own voice, with a feeling of levitation, of having escaped the constraints of gravity. The climate, the landscape, my own inner release coincided to give me a feeling of euphoria' (27).

So at the heart of Kefala's project is a profound response to the present world of Australia, twinned with a persistent, lingering and formative apprehension of intrinsic foreignness framed by the mid-century. Importantly, this apprehension of Australia is not something that can be communicated elsewhere – in Greece, for instance. Kefala's protagonist in 'Summer Visit' struggles to explain to her friends in Greece 'about Sydney, our trips to Broken Hill. They cannot understand this infatuation with space. Australia seems quite improbable from here' (60). It is from the basis of this complexity that Kefala has engaged with the monoliths of culture, art and literature in this country, and in a project extending beyond the scope of her own writing. In 1971 she took up a position at the Australia Council for the Arts, which had been established in 1967 and then expanded in 1973, working primarily in the area of community arts. In the 1980s she established the Council's program of ethnic arts officers and 'herself toured Australia over a period of several years, working with individual artists, giving them advice and support while at the same time encouraging existing community groups and organisations to recognise and support cultural activities'

(Blonski 7). Along with the tangible and substantial contribution to the arts represented by Kefala's professional service here, it is important also to keep in mind that the idea of 'the Arts' itself was being challenged and considered at this time, and that the community arts work initiated by Kefala fed into those debates. As the 1992 report *Arts for a Multicultural Australia 1973–1991* (known as the 'Blonski Report' after its author Annette Blonski) noted:

> The Australia Council was established … during the period of community activism and changing discourses of public administration and management. A broader definition of culture, one that is not based solely on artistic production, lies at the core of the arguments and debates that have characterised the Australia Council's history in relation to what was originally termed 'ethnic arts,' then 'multicultural arts' and finally 'arts for a multicultural Australia'. (2)

The shifts in definition and focus here are interesting, but also important is the capaciousness of the sense of the arts that is at play, and how central the questioning and expanding of that term was. A report Kefala prepared for the Council's Community Arts Board in 1980 argued that not only was the term 'ethnic' to be understood as covering 'both individual artists and migrant communities', but also that the term 'arts' should likewise include 'everything from high art to traditional'. Her concern was for Australia Council funding for 'ethnic' or 'multicultural arts' to move away from 'folk/dance routines' in favour of more ambitious plans to support training for artists, and to 'raise awareness and explore possible new directions' (Blonski 22). These concerns are central to understanding the threads of connection and community that extend across Kefala's own work.

These aspects of Kefala's life and work, together with the astonishing breadth, originality and achievement of her work, were the primary stimulus behind a symposium that was held in March 2019 at the University of New South Wales, Sydney,

supported jointly by the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. The event brought together over two days literary scholars, writers, artists, poets, philosophers, readers and friends to consider, remember, honour and celebrate Antigone Kefala's work and achievement. The papers presented there form the heart of this collection of writings. The collection opens – very properly – with an essay by Sneja Gunew, whose work in the field of migrant and diasporic writing has long been internationally known and respected. Gunew has in recent decades expanded her critical purview to include works by writers from ever-more diverse locations and contexts, most recently configured in the locution of 'post-multicultural writers as neo-cosmopolitan mediators', signalling the shifting parameters and conceptual demands of this field. However, it is important to remember how substantial has been her contribution to the reading and understanding of migrant and multicultural writing in Australia, and, importantly, to her discussion of particular writers in and around those traditions. In her essay for this collection, which began as the keynote address at the 2019 symposium, she brings together her thinking over many decades on these topics and on Antigone Kefala's writing in particular. Gunew begins by insisting on the need to expand and even distort our understanding of international aesthetic categories such as Modernism and to question the dominance of English within those categories so as to include and account for the multilingual as itself a figure and index for the persistent departure made by so many from ideas of 'home'. She brings to this her insistence that 'the cosmopolitanism associated with diaspora and migration [is] to be not at home but to be uncomfortable everywhere, to experience pervasive unease based on noticing the exclusion that made inclusions possible'. To this broad critique she brings as a further foundational ground Kefala's writing itself and its long reception.

Gunew describes the 'exhilarating' process of re-reading Kefala's oeuvre and of working through Karalis' and Nickas' 2013 edited collection of scholarship and review, reminding us

of the substantial nature of the scholarship that Kefala's work has generated, and in the process drawing attention to the robustness of the intellectual and aesthetic fields of writing about multilingual and diasporic literature, in Australia and internationally. Gunew's essay is itself capacious, as if by way of testament to the substance of Kefala's oeuvre and achievement, and to her readers and critics. Her inquiry into the Modernist roots and reference points in Kefala's work takes her, as it also does Kate Livett, into the surrealist and psychoanalytic dimensions of Kefala's prose and poetry, with the traces of the 'anarchic' and the 'uncanny' that accompany them. Gunew addresses the multilingual capacities of Kefala's work through a consideration of the ways that translation has always, in more or less literal senses, tracked alongside it, signalling but also undermining its status as writing that exists 'outside a so-called mainstream'. She then explores the acoustic dimensions of the multilingual in Kefala in terms of the stylistic importance of what Kefala herself calls 'tonality' in her work. Here Gunew draws on Roland Barthes' 'Grain of the Voice', expanding Barthes' theorisation of the embodiment of language to refer more to 'the materiality of English', a move that returns us to an enriched concept of the multilingual.

In moving to the specificities of Kefala's style, Gunew – following Kefala – invokes the baroque as 'something that acts as a mise-en-abyme, a key to interpretation that plays on rhetorical sophistication and playfulness'. The intellectual, indeed metaphysical, poetics of Kefala's work have engaged several other writers in the collection. Angelo Loukakis' essay 'The Geography of Soul' traces the interconnections of space, experience and identity in Kefala's life and work, including migrations and traversals across the planet, cities and landscapes, and the inhabitations of houses and rooms. Within an oeuvre that records multiple forms of displacement, Loukakis identifies the acuity and audacity of Kefala's judgement within the map of textuality. Specifically, he opens with the assertion that Kefala's poetry and prose do not 'ignore the real, but allow it its due and

no more', and from this builds a complex map of her oeuvre. Not only does Kefala write across the genres of poetry, prose, essay and memoir, but any one of her texts may overlay multiple literary modes from realist account to the surrealism of dreams in the representation of conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious experience and the movements between them. Within the context of an Australian literary tradition founded on realism, this wide textual reach re-places realism within a much larger, more disparate and more productive map. As Loukakis notes, Kefala's re-placement of realism is especially enabling for writers with a migrant background who have been expected to depict their experience as a form of 'fictionalised journalism'. In her refusal of these limitations – indeed the force of her 'unclouded European eyes and a knowing and sophisticated angle on the universe', Kefala dismantled some of these expectations. Loukakis states: 'Her writing spoke to me in many ways, but among them were "try harder", "let go", "don't be afraid"'.

In 'Worldly Interiors in the Fiction of Antigone Kefala', Elizabeth McMahon also focuses on the centrality of space in Kefala's work in a reading of the interior spaces of Kefala's prose. These include domestic residences, refugee accommodation and the private room as they are experienced in daily life and in dreams. In their shifting significance from shelters to prisons, from enclosures to thresholds, these interiors variously offer and refuse Kefala's characters the possibility of inhabitation, of sustained and sustainable ways of being in the world. The profound connection between the domestic interior and the human psyche constitutes what Hans Blumenberg terms an 'absolute metaphor' – a metaphor that underpins our thought even though its significances may change over time. In Kefala's fiction the 'absolute metaphor' of the interior is the foundation and scaffolding of her characters' identity-formation. It variously provides and denies the spatialised coordinates of subjective possibility, of survival. McMahon frames her analysis of Kefala's prose through key theorists of modernity and literature who have

mapped the correlations between the domestic interior and the representation of the inner life, including the larger home of the world. These include philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who argues that the postwar subject seeks 'spheres' of inhabitation, spaces and cultures that provide 'immunity' from the 'monstrosity' of the world. Reading Kefala's fiction alongside Sloterdijk and other philosophical works highlights the large scale and scope of her fictional project which, while intensely personal, records the creative labour of making and remaking self and world in the wake of the devastation of war, homelessness, exile and migration.

Penelope Stavrou reads Kefala's prose works through the figure of Homer's Penelope the weaver, as a way of mapping the 'interconnected and gendered issues of authorship, time and self-reflexivity'. Penelope's daily craft-making and unmaking, determined by her predicament and the need to fend off unwanted suitors, highlights the flows and repetitions between life and art. As Stavrou writes, Kefala's prose works also direct us to the interconnections between and across life and art in complex ways, including the Modernist experiments with life as art from Wilde to the Bauhaus, practices of self-citation in the manner of Gertrude Stein, and the exchanges between her prose fiction and the autobiographical genre of *Sydney Journals* (2008). Stavrou reads the textual repetitions of scenes and incidents woven throughout her oeuvre as Kefala's excavations of the representation of her experience and the interrogation of their relationship to language and genre over time.

Vrasidas Karalis engages with the ways Kefala maps the spatialised coordinates of being and knowing, arguing that her poetry simultaneously places and displaces her readers. In the Australian context, he writes, Kefala successfully decentres mainstream poetic writing partly by the translingual energy and scope of her English. Karalis organises this discussion according to a series of related oppositions that he identifies in her work. Of the dual qualities of presence and absence in her poetry he claims that its pared-back, elliptical intensity is 'not simply a rhetorical

trope or a formal device' but an 'existential topos' that constructs a dialogue between presence and absence. In this way, he writes, 'her work *places* us within a strange topography of being, and at the same time *displaces* us from it'. However, for Karalis, presence and absence in Kefala's poetry are not oppositional as might be understood from English semantics alone. Drawing on Latin and Greek etymology and the multiplicity of meanings that attach to 'absence' and its connections to presence, Karalis shows how the 'cumulative sign of "absence" indicates a variety of modes of perception which link the elliptical articulation in her work with the existential quest for presence and completeness *outside the text*'.

Kate Livett begins with the importance of death in Kefala's work: its effects, presence and imminence, which are central to her intellectual as well as her aesthetic project, and which are linked in Freud's analysis to the matter of dreams in general. In tracing the working of dreams across all of Kefala's prose works, from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s, Livett provides an important survey of the persistence of the working and working-through of loss across the breadth of Kefala's writing and in light of the ways that Kefala's biography – the story of self-creation and re-creation in the face of death – resonates and deflects through her work. This analysis identifies the role of the dream in the bereaved's negotiation of the conditions of mourning, which admits loss and melancholy, and refuses to relinquish the attachment to those who have been lost. Ultimately, as Livett shows, no matter how nightmarish, 'dreams in these texts enable the processing of death as a central dilemma of life'.

Michael Tsianikas returns us to some of Kefala's philosophical concerns. His essay stages an engagement with the twinned ideas of 'conscience' and 'consciousness' in Kefala's work through a consideration of the etymology of the terms, drawing on and troubling both the Greek roots and the European intellectual traditions that sit behind the words, as well as behind Kefala's writing itself. Tsianikas' aim is to open out questions of 'knowledge or awareness about the outside world and ourselves' in

terms of how these have shifted and changed in time, and to draw on that mobility of meaning and reference as a starting point for considering Kefala's own engagement with these ideas. Central to this is her negotiation with the act/s of writing, and the position of the writer, which Tsianikas reads through the logic and the etymology of the writer-as-father. Against this position, Tsianikas reads Kefala as radically creative: 'She turns pre-established ideas, language and concepts inwards or against themselves, adding another linguistic, psychological or phenomenal dimension, where "new" things are taking shape, materialising: making something by undoing it'. He argues that her work is structured by an 'apophatic "no"', signalling a method and a being that is always negative: 'not "who am I?" but "who am I not?"' Tsianikas also addresses the relationship between the interior life and the external reality, framing his analysis with the statement that literature's role is to represent the ways complexities of knowledge are processed, especially the shadows of spoken and unspoken languages. He identifies the ways in which Kefala's poetry and prose 'unveil[s] split moments before the conscience is made'. These moments comprise 'pre-determined and unconscious elements, gestures, thoughts, feelings, use of language and sounds'; they dramatically affect the relationship with the self, which is itself deeply divided.

Other essays seek to locate Kefala's work and significance not only within the larger rubrics of her immense reading of poetry and her familiarity with international music, cinema and art, nor just within the substantial circuits of theorising the aesthetic and conceptual complexities of migrant, diaspora and multicultural writing, but deeply within her own local world of post-postwar Sydney. Anna Couani provides a detailed account of the rich and diverse micro-worlds of poetry, politics and aesthetic adventure to be found in Sydney through the last decades of the twentieth century, worlds within which Antigone Kefala flourished as a writer, reader and thinker. Couani traces the intricate, often personal (and often fraught) interrelations of small-press poetry

publications, writing groups and friendships between poets and artists and the ways their work was and wasn't picked up and read more widely. For Couani, the diversity and particularity of this context and location of Kefala's work contribute to its complexity and the ways her poetry and prose move

> constantly across the boundaries of the public and the personal, the temporal and the eternal, the temporary and the permanent, the cozily familiar and the wholly alien, the culturally embedded and the universal, the topical and the universal, consciousness and unconsciousness, dream and mindfulness.

The deterritorialisation enacted by Kefala's poetics thus renders it, Couani proposes,

> quintessentially and self-consciously Australian in the sense that Australian Anglophone culture is liminal, a culture of crossed and overlapping references from outside itself, and except for the work of Indigenous practitioners, one that rarely beds down exclusively in local Indigenous culture, or even in the here and now.

Brigitta Olubas examines a more particular aspect of Kefala's local context: her friendship with artists and poets Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius, also mentioned in Couani's essay. This friendship developed out of Kefala's work with the Australia Council for the Arts through the 1970s and 1980s. Kefala brought her own deep familiarity with European poetics to bear on her work for the Australia Council, as well as her connection to the local experimental arts scene. Olubas examines the ways that much work by migrant writers and artists has been routinely unacknowledged and overlooked within local Australian contexts even while that same work was recognised, admired, published and exhibited internationally. She draws on Roland Barthes' account of the amateur as defined 'not necessarily … by

a lesser knowledge, an imperfect technique' but rather as 'the one who does not make himself heard', to consider the ways that amateurism is connected not only to community arts practices, but also to experimental arts, to work that is produced and that circulates outside mainstream arts economies. Olubas locates this connection in the larger, diasporic artist networks that Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius maintained with Jurgis Maciunas, the New York–based founder of the artist community Fluxus, and with acclaimed experimental filmmakers Jonas and Adolfas Mekas. She traces a flow back and forth between the specific representations in their work of 'Australia' or of 'Lithuania' and in light of the shifting location of the 'No Place' of migration.

There is a thread of firstness running through many of these essays, whereby Kefala's readers retrace and remember their discovery of her writing and the ways that it has subsequently helped determine and organise their larger intellectual, aesthetic and professional projects. While Anna Couani introduces Kefala's writing through a history of her own friendship with Kefala and through their shared circles, Konstandina Dounis provides a different history, taking us through an account of the scholarly reception of Kefala's work through a memoir of her own reading of Kefala and her encounter with the field of migrant literary studies in Australia. Dounis begins with the first poem she read by Kefala, a poem so striking at first glance because of its 'familiarity' to her; its metaphorical 'old ships', carrying 'the furniture of generations' becoming literally a part of 'an alternative narrative … of the inauspicious arrival of our parents on old decaying ships'. At the same time, Dounis reflects, the poem carried notes of profound unfamiliarity, due to the ways that Kefala's work maintained a place for itself outside the formal field of Greek and Greek-Australian writing. From this tension between the known and the imagined, Dounis recalls her own discovery of the intellectual and theoretical field of migrant writing in Australia, and, in particular, the place – contested at times but also insistent – of women's writing within that field. Her essay takes

the form of a personal memoir, tracing her engagement with migrant and minority writing by women over the decades of its development in Australia, and supported by commentary from key theorists from Australia and elsewhere. Her memoir is larded through with moments – of interruption or of intensification – from her own life. Central here, as with so many essays in this collection, is the work of Sneja Gunew in identifying, recording and collecting this material – and at the same time demonstrating the continuing necessity of such practices, and of opening up the theoretical, conceptual and aesthetic tools needed for analysing this work. There is a sense of the intellectual excitement of the work being done in the field, in particular in terms of thinking through the implications of concepts of minority and marginality and their bearing on the deep poetry of Kefala's writing. And alongside this is a reminder that there is a historical dimension to this work; that poetry encases lives and memories while it shapes and imagines unutterable alternatives.

Like Dounis, Efi Hatzimanolis begins with her recollection of the first poem she read by Kefala – a 'dense, tiny dot of a poem' published in the weekend edition of *The Australian* newspaper in the early 1970s. For Hatzimanolis, too, there was a shock of recognition; an awareness of the significance of this publication for 'a second-generation Australian schoolgirl of Greek heritage who had never read anything by any immigrant writer'. From this beginning, Hatzimanolis traces a kind of unravelling of the sense of identity that might be forged in history, in daily life and in the imagination, and she considers this in relation to a broad account of the preoccupations of Modernism in Australia, as important for Kefala's work as the history of the migrant experience. The dislocation of self is fundamental to Kefala's aesthetic, and Hatzimanolis focuses closely on the poems in Kefala's 2016 collection, *Fragments*, to trace Kefala's relation to 'local landscapes', their complex reimagining in light of Australia's colonial dispossession, and 'her own partial presence' within these. Hatzimanolis reads the poems closely, through lenses of time, and

of embodiment, fracturing and displacement. She finds memory lacing through the poetic selves Kefala imagines, crafts, recollects and undoes in the poems, through to the inevitable forgetting, 'the entropy laying waste to memory'. In this way her reading of the *Absence* collection works as a kind of re-engagement with Kefala's larger oeuvre and achievement; the poetic imaginary crafted over nearly a half-century of writing.

Jane Gibian also approaches Kefala's work through the window it opens not so much onto the history of migrant experience and imagination as onto the aesthetic corollaries of these. She focuses on 'the ironic distance and distortions of scale' that characterise Kefala's short fictions, reading them as points of imaginative engagement with the vagaries of selfhood and connection for young women of migrant background. She finds young female characters in the stories trying out 'different roles', as they negotiate the full drama of linguistic complexity – which is for Kefala always poetic before it is anything else – and their own capacity for revolt. In their focus on youthful protagonists, the stories direct attention to the future as well as to the past, collected by families with their rituals, as Gibian quotes Melina's Aunt Niki in *The Island*: 'I feel I am carrying Europe in me, moving in its rhythm … a Europe that is probably no longer' (73). Gibian's focus on the in-betweenness of cultures and selves, and the 'miracles' of poetry and imagination that spring from this complexity, opens out the capacity of Kefala's prose to attend to the diversities of experience.

Through attentive reading of – and listening to – Kefala's poetry, Ivor Indyk identifies Kefala's distinctive voice, which he argues is not to be found 'in the utterance of a particular speaker' but rather 'subsumed into' the formal features and effects of the poetry. As he identifies, the speaking 'I' of Kefala's poetry 'knows its own vulnerability – that is what makes its observations so acute'; it effaces itself in the face of world and experience. Indyk demonstrates these operations in poems from across Kefala's oeuvre. Discussing a recent poem, 'The Voice' from

Fragments (2016), Indyk locates Kefala's voice in the characteristic minimalism that contains and generates compressed energy and in the paratactical accumulation of detail that leads to an emotional explosion of energy. Ironically, as Indyk shows, the force of these effects works to 'ambush' the speaker herself. In this poem the conventional position of the speaking subject is occupied by the 'attacking' past, which leaves the poetic speaker without agency – an object rather than a subject. As an object, the 'observing eye' of Kefala's poetry always knows its own vulnerability.

Indyk connects the distinctive effects of Kefala's lexicon and prosody to her polyglossic reach. Writing in English as her fourth language after Romanian, French and Greek, Kefala's language revitalises English. This denaturalisation estranges the reader from their habitual relationships to language, leaving them exposed to feel the emotional force of a poem's ambush upon self, experience and meaning. Indyk traces the ways Kefala's poetry and prose displace the singular 'I' into the collective 'we' as the (estranged, foreign) individual identifies and connects with her multiple communities. Kefala also sets up in opposition to the first-person 'I' and the 'we' a third-person 'they', which refers to the clichés of mainstream, hegemonic thought and institutions. This collective 'we' is not all-inclusive but it is a space and a position of immense possibility. Kefala's 'we' is a convivial and creative construction, a cultural habitus of distinctive differences collectivised into community. Alongside – even through – the intensity of alienation she models a utopian possibility of a civil society founded on a poetics of radical openness. As Loukakis writes, Kefala 'has lived too much history to naively propose the power of literature to change the world'. However, what she does offer is a body of writing charged with the intensity of being in the world, where self and world are internally and relationally estranged. The reader, too, is invited to navigate the relationship between, say, the ambush of an image or the sparse absence of a poetic line, and the negotiations of self, history and the world. In rewiring this interconnection in the face of war,

exile and manifold grief, Kefala's life and writing fashion ways of being in the world, when both self and world are foreign and shattered and where, in this highly qualified condition, she stages the intense ignitions of creative survival.

A Note on book titles

The reader will note references to both 'The First Journey' and *The First Journey* throughout the collection. The first refers to the novella of that name and the latter refers to the volume that took its title from that novella. This volume also included 'The Boarding House'.

We note also that selections from four separate poetry collections were incorporated into the 1998 edition of *Absence: New and Selected Poems*. These include *The Alien* (1973) *Thirsty Weather* (1978) *European Notebook* (1988) and *Absence* (1992).

Works cited

Blonski, Annette. *Arts for a Multicultural Australia 1973–1991: An Account of Australia Council Policies*, Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts, 1992.

Digby, Jenny. 'Antigone Kefala: A Labyrinthian Linguistic Field'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Karalis and Nickas, Brighton, Owl Press, 2013, pp. 31–44.

Karalis, Vrasidas and Helen Nickas, eds. *Antigone Kefala': A Writer's Journey*. Brighton, Owl Press, 2013. Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey: Two Short Novels*, Glebe, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *The Island*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1984.

—— 'Towards a Language', *Displaced Persons*, edited by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, Dangaroo Press, 1988, pp. 75–82. Reprinted in Karalis and Nickas, pp. 21–9.

—— *Summer Visit: Three Novellas*, Artarmon, Giramondo, 2002.

—— *Sydney Journals*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.

1

‘To find our measure, exactly, not the echo of other voices’: Antigone Kefala’s Ex-centric Australian Modernity

Sneja Gunew

> And then
> we were in the old house
> full of silver light.
> As we came in
> someone was plucking
> at an aluminium sound.
> The wooden floors had gone
> and now we walked on glass
> (*Absence* 13)

As is so often the case with her work, Kefala’s poem projects a reader into the uncanny where the familiar – ‘old house’ – becomes unsettled and precarious – ‘we walked on glass’. This essay explores how the defining of a single national language,

literature and culture has metamorphosed into something uncanny and menacing for many who live and write in Australia. For example, in the rich collection of essays dealing with Australian literature gathered in Peter Kirkpatrick and Robert Dixon's 2012 collection *Republics of Letters* there is no serious engagement with languages other than English and the assumption prevails that these literary communities are all conducted in English, even when one chapter looks at the writings of young refugees whose first language is not English (Brown). Implicitly it is what they accomplish in English that matters and Brown's chapter functions as a kind of bookend to Kylie Mirmohamadi's essay on 1890s Hobart and the measures taken to consolidate 'Australia's place in the ever-expanding British Empire of words' (24). But perhaps we should pay more attention to how that 'Empire of words' has changed.

In 2019 we saw a celebration of the Bauhaus movement, one of those landmarks of Modernism that keeps being reinterpreted by sequential modernities and is also an example of rendering dwelling and dwellings uncanny. The Bauhaus is essentially defined by unsettling and exile since many of its proponents fled Nazi Germany thus enabling the dissemination of their influence across the globe. In comparable ways, another element of Modernism, the development of cinema and specifically Hollywood cinema, was also defined by these exiles. Nonetheless, in spite of this pattern of expatriation, rupture, and the intrusion of new languages and styles to generate cultural revolutions, in certain parts of the world there is a tenacious hanging on or renewed allegiance to a universalist notion of language. Such monolingualism assumes that all of history, of being human, takes place in one language that, in effect, effaces the presence of all language as a mediating force. This logic prevails despite the ruptures and interrogations, of postcolonialism, feminism and, at present, critical race theory. How can one imagine that globalisation, internationalism, transnationalism took place only, say, in English? Such a wilful myopia demands explanation.

English, as well as other languages in varying degrees such as French, German or Russian, carry within them histories of imperialism that are camouflaged with the notion of cultural refinement as a varnish that seals over such uncivilised realities. Since Shakespeare wrote in dazzling English, we are unlikely to exhume the genocidal colonial histories conducted in English and the ways in which the imposition of the colonial language was an intrinsic part of the trauma. When exposed to Goethe's scintillating German we might forget the Holocaust. At the same time simply writing in English or being translated into English does not guarantee belonging to English; Behrouz Boochani, translated into English, is apparently not Australian enough in the eyes of some and so does not deserve the Australian literary prizes he was awarded.[1]

Australian English is a recognised version of the greater Commonwealth of Englishes and much studied by linguists but is not necessarily viewed as specifically informing Australian literature. Mostly it is assumed to comprise Scottish, Welsh and Irish components of linguistic colonialism and, particularly in place-names, some markers (almost in the sense of tombstones) of Aboriginal languages. But the legacies of the many other languages that arrived in Australia are not visible or analysed to the same degree in literary studies.[2] In the wake of postcolonial studies over the last two decades, the idea of the existence of many kinds of English that disrupt English from the inside and are manifestations of a kind of resistance to colonialism is an accepted field: Indian, Caribbean, African Englishes etc. etc. The code switching typically associated with these disruptions leading to a refashioning of English were derogatively labelled patois, slang, dialect and had been associated with shame.[3] This evaluation is slowly changing and one of its most vibrant contemporary manifestations is acknowledged to be hip hop around the world, including Indigenous hip hop (Minestrelli, Mays). In other words, it is time once again to consider the multilingual histories that reside in Australia and these include (of course) Indigenous

languages; time as well to learn from postcolonial studies and to consider the plural Englishes produced in Australia post-postcolonialism. As I've mentioned in earlier work, Australia's multiculturalism continues to be haunted by colonialism in ways that still require much further research (Gunew, *Haunted Nations*).

In Australia, Antigone Kefala has always written in English. 'In dreams begins the journey' is the first sentence of Kefala's first poem ('Holidays in the Country') in her first publication, *The Alien* (1973). Dreams and journeys are the reference points and both are entries into understanding Kefala's work. But what is their significance? The motif of the journey is easier to grasp. This could represent the journey of a life but Kefala's work is also punctuated by journeys in time through a number of languages. English, the language in which she chose to write is, after all, her fourth language. A paradigmatic journey in Western literature undertaken by Odysseus comprises leaving and returning home. According to her essay 'Towards a Language' (1988) Kefala's mother's family comes from Ithaka but her family was not fated to return there. The trajectory for many migrants excludes return when their countries/languages of origin no longer exist, and so involves manufacturing serial homes – always provisional. My recent book, *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017), examines the ways in which critical 'cosmopolitanism' as contemporary concept functions in relation to different groups and I argued that the cosmopolitanism associated with diaspora and migration was to be not at home but to be uncomfortable everywhere, to experience pervasive unease based on noticing the exclusions that made inclusion possible.[4] Ultimately, this state engendered a reflexivity regarding notions of belonging and an alertness to the erasures on which they are always based.

Since I have written numerous interpretations of Kefala's work over the last four decades I wanted to try a different path in this essay by reading her work chronologically and also reading, from cover to cover, the wonderful casebook on Kefala produced by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas.[5] Both were exhilarating

processes that generated a sense of time-travel because different moments in Australian cultural debates were vividly reanimated. From doing things this way (a kind of slow reading) I also gained the realisation that my essay would not reproduce the usual tale of inexplicable marginalisation and the frustrations that attend this. Instead I noted the powerful ways in which Kefala's work had left its mark on debates and on people and how we were in danger of overlooking this fact because the reach has always exceeded the grasp and perhaps we've concentrated too much on the grasp, one that encompassed the desire to change the dynamics of national cultural debates entirely. I realised that we had not given enough acknowledgement to the immense appreciation of her work in many, many ways over the years. Writing this now, I am aware of being in conversation with numerous people across Australia and the world, something that was not the case forty years ago. Even those who felt at odds with her work have been forced to engage with what she was attempting to do: an example I am relishing once more is Ivor Indyk's careful dissection of Peter Pierce's ludicrous review of Kefala's publication *Sydney Journals*.[6]

In this collection, Kefala's work is being reinterpreted as an overlooked paradigm in Australian literature within the framework of the interlocking concepts of Modernism/Modernities/Contemporaneity – all linked to a notion of aesthetics, an element that has often been withheld from these 'New Australian' authors. In a nutshell, migrants have traditionally provided rich fodder for, but have also been subsumed by, sociological categories. Nothing wrong with that except that it has been at the cost of viewing them at all with respect to the culturally complex aesthetic contributions they produced in every art form. But once again, do we truly believe that Modernism/Modernity happens only in English or has to be translated into English in order to be deemed significant?

As a way of rethinking this terrain, in my last book I tried to re-centre the multilingualism of these postwar and more recent 'migrant' writers and at the core of such approaches is the more

abstract concept of language itself. From that first publication Kefala was being classified as writing an English that was broken apart or somehow 'un-Australian' (Radford 200). She herself refers to the un-English nature of her writing, describing her style as too baroque and at odds with the 'understatement' that English in New Zealand and Australia requires.

> I used to write in a language which appeared to be too … baroque for the local scene, so for many years I could not publish at all, and to a certain extent my language changed and became more subdued … or denser … I mean it's still un-English. (Nickas, *Migrant Daughters* 226–7; see also Digby)

As I suggested earlier, the last few decades of postcolonial studies have reinterpreted the function of English as an imperial and global language (the one succeeding the other) where the Englishes generated as part of this history in various parts of the colonies bear the seeds of resistance. Ngugi wa Thiong'o was one of the first to set up the critique of English itself and what it meant not to write in the dominant colonial language. In her analysis of Ngugi's position, Rey Chow treats colonial language as a kind of prosthesis from which a native speaker is increasingly alienated. We become, in Julia Kristeva's phrase, 'strangers to ourselves' (qtd Chow 41) but rather than seeing this as a disadvantage, Chow suggests that

> It is precisely this severance, this cut with its racializing jaggedness that comes as a given in colonial education, that places those who have been thus subjugated in a certain advantageous position: the colonized is much closer to the truth of the mediated and divisive character of all linguistic communication. (42)

Dohra Ahmad's anthology titled *Rotten English* showcases some of the vibrant consequences of these remakings of English.

It has also happened with the other global languages such as German (as in Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kafka writing in a 'minority' language) and French (Pascale Casanova traces this in her influential contribution to debates in World Literature but there are also the earlier interventions by Derrida and Édouard Glissant). What requires further attention in Australia are the ways in which Australian English is a postcolonial contribution to the Englishes that occupy the empire of English and that analyses of all the languages that have gone into its making be researched and analysed as part of the Australian 'republic of letters' (Kirkpatrick and Dixon) or 'scenes of reading' (Dixon and Rooney).

The monolingualism that prevails in Australia continues to impede an openness to other cultural influences – something one notes in the otherwise rich discussions concerning Australian literature's transnationalism.[7] But to return to Modernism, the Modernist aesthetics introduced by the postwar migrants differed as one might expect from the prevailing Modernist signposts in Australia that always seemed to be mediated by British and US reference points. And yet, when one considers canonical figures such as Joyce and Beckett, both of them are defined by their seeking out other languages as part of the ruptures they generated in their work: *Finnegan's Wake* in particular for Joyce and Beckett's movement into French as a way of interrogating the seemingly invisible access to interiority provided by the English language. When contemplating language as a tool the writer had to be estranged from it in order to anatomise it. This resonates with Linda Hutcheon's summary of postmodernism as an ex-centric force that interrogates previous authoritative regimes and consists of 'the multiple, the heterogeneous, the different' (66).

In the essays in the Karalis and Nickas casebook, a number of the writers refer to Kefala's own essay 'Towards a Language', which first appeared in Holst Petersen and Rutherford's *Displaced Persons* in 1988 and featured a painting by Nikos Kypraios on its cover. Kypraios, a close friend of Kefala, had immigrated to

Australia but then returned to Greece and could be called an example of an artist working in the Greek Modernist tradition. Kefala's own comments on coming to a language succinctly define her approach to writing: 'What I also found interesting were the roots of the words, and the discovery of how interconnected a language is to a way of life, moral, social, and aesthetic assumptions' (Karalis and Nickas 24–5). Or here is an observation recorded in *Sydney Journals*: 'English, infinitely seductive, and in spite of its lingua franca status, international inputs and so on, very closed in, not allowing for wider cultural truth' (51). Hence the importance for Kefala to find in her chosen language a measure, as she termed it, that is beyond the echo of other voices (*Thirsty Weather* 8), a disruption of English from within that we have come to associate with postcolonialism.

> But in my case I don't feel that words clutter me, on the contrary, I feel that I have to re-create them with difficulty out of thin air so to speak, their nature always too self-contained, too well defined, as if stone presences that constantly demand their singular places, demand that one should acknowledge their individual existence in relation to a meaning. I would feel that this repetitive, mechanical use means that I am letting them down, emptying them of their meaning. (*Sydney Journals* 15)

We pick up on the phrase 'stone presences', and this idea of a language being imbued with an inner dynamic force or inherent resistance is a recurring element Kefala often acknowledges, that any piece of writing has to find its own measure and cannot be forced into a pre-existent agenda (*Sydney Journals* 140, 178, 223).

Vrasidas Karalis' essay in the casebook places Kefala firmly within a global postwar experimentalism, 'Kefala belongs to the trans-national literary movement which started after World War II, aspiring to dismantle the grand rhetorical tropes, systems and narratives compiled by the figures of high modernism in the first decades of the twentieth century' (255). But how this 'high

modernism' became part of Australia is a question to be pondered since the Modernist influences that entered Australia in the wake of postwar migration included a Modernism in other languages: German, Russian, French, the last also via Vietnamese, more recently, as well as Arabic, Chinese etc.[8] This multilingual Modernism was flanked by an internationalism that was refracted in some respects in the Australian cultural landscape through the stand-off in the postwar period between the Nationalists (P. R. Stephensen, the Palmers) and the Internationalists (Patrick White, Christina Stead, Max Harris and the Angry Penguins).[9] These exclusionary debates carry implications for the transnationalism of Australian literature that is perpetuated today. It would be interesting for those other influences in other languages to be belatedly factored in far more robustly than has been the case so far.[10] My questions are meant to illustrate why we need much more research to build on this richness. In an interview with Helen Nickas, Kefala listed the writers who had influenced her: 'Brought up as I was, on French and Russian literature, Rumanian and Greek, I admire many writers, it is difficult to give you a small list: Baudelaire, Flaubert, Akhmatova, Bulgakov, Rilke, Seferis, Lorca, Porter (Katherine Anne), Elizabeth Harrower, Duras, Austen and so on' (Nickas, *Migrant Daughters* 238).

At the same time that the specific language mattered and that English had to be 'mastered', if it issued from the wrong phenotype, people simply could not hear it. The following example from *The Island* has been quoted by many:

> I spoke. I could see from his face that he had not the faintest idea what I was saying, the meaning stopped somewhere mid-air between us … I could see in his whole attitude the immense surprise of being confronted, here in his own room, at the University, by something as foreign as myself. (22–3)

This description of a university tutorial brilliantly captures that experience for many postwar migrants (including the second

generation) when they entered that institutional world of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus of Education. The subtle ways in which particular languages engineer types of subjectivity, hail them into being, is also manifested in Kefala's children's book *Alexia*, where the satire comes into sharp relief when the multiple meanings of anodyne terms such as 'happiness' are explored at a suburban lunch party for children. In contemporary terms, we are now in another related regime of repression where fluctuating social media 'likes' help generate teen suicides. Alexia, as an 'advanced child', studies the new language very seriously as the final section of that text tells us.[11]

Some of the other ways such impediments to mutual understanding, or at least communication, persist are registered in Kefala's work as an emphasis on the narrator/protagonist as performer in the sense of ventriloquist. There is an acute awareness of performing certain roles and even of being split in two, as is the case with the protagonist of 'The First Journey':

> For there were always two inside. The one that moved and laughed. Cried and was angry, had attitudes and demanded things and was stubborn in wanting, that felt the vacuum and was afraid. And there was the second one. The one that undermined every effort towards an involvement. (39)

In later texts such as *The Island* it is conveyed through the performative gestures of a protagonist coming into femininity – spiked with an intense awareness of gender dynamics. In the novella 'Intimacy' (*Summer Visit*) such female performativity is conveyed through the protagonist Helen reacting to being endlessly admired in the following telling ways: 'An admiration that automatically cut you off, isolated you …An idolatry that annihilated you' (15). That foregrounding of the nature of the split and performative subject is of course also an ingredient of many familiar Modernist texts, as in the example of Virginia Woolf.

Dreams

One element that has intrigued me for a long time is the way dreams punctuate Kefala's writing and persist to her most recent publication, *Fragments*. In an early essay on Kefala (1985) included in the Karalis and Nickas collection, Judith Brett explores this motif in relation to her different reactions to 'The First Journey' and *The Island*. Using the concept of the misrecognition that accompanies a split self that defines the Lacanian mirror stage, Brett argues that Kefala's work is permeated by 'the logic of primary process or dream thinking, not just in the sequence of the images but in the sliding of agency' (131). Since I have been doing some work recently on the Surrealist women painters (another aspect of Modernism belatedly being scrutinised), particularly Leonora Carrington, I was struck by the ways in which dreams insert another form of visuality, both painterly and cinematic ('"From a speculative point of view"'). This visuality creates both a landscape and temporality that constantly juxtaposes Western notions of linear time with an element of mythic or 'deep' time (in the geological sense), something that one sees emerging in the rapidly growing literature on climate change and the need for a longer perspective that I have linked to Indigenous writers such as Alexis Wright (*Post-Multicultural Writers*). Kefala's line 'my sealed tomb / travels in my dreams' ('Inheritance', *European Notebook* 35) is one such haunting example – both visual and temporal. In Leonora Carrington's own writings the dreams are sutured to the plot in ways that enable the reader to diagnose the continuities between daily conscious and unconscious dynamics – registering the work that is involved in keeping these two elements in play. As in Kefala's work, dreams offer an alternative perspective to surface banalities, repetitive social rituals and expressions. The underside of language constantly beckons with its anarchic possibilities. In a recent paper I gave at a German Australian Studies conference I used a stanza from Kefala's 'Coming Home' to introduce this uncanny element of the dream life:

What if
getting out of the bus
in these abandoned suburbs
pale under the street lights,
what if, as we stepped down
we forgot who we are
became lost in this absence
emptied of memory
we, the only witness of ourselves
before whom
shall the drama be enacted?
(*European Notebook* 47)

In part I was signalling on that occasion the ways in which migrants and a migrant aesthetic were the (as yet) unconscious bedrock of Australian cultural discussions where these 'witnesses' need, precisely, to be accommodated as part of a much larger audience. This uncanny element is something Brian Castro discussed in his 2019 ASAL Patrons lecture when he referred to Kefala's work as always having

> a narrative consequence in her writing, whether in poetry or prose, which is beyond mere observation or expansion as it drives inward to a murmuring meditation received underwater … a memory which is familiar but unhoused … I think the reason this can occur is because her language is a paratext of its own translation into other worlds and other cultures. (Castro n.p.)

My own response to this is that for me Kefala's approach, her style, has as much to do with the paratactical as the paratextual and the ways in which references to dreams punctuate her work is another indication of this pattern. Borrowing the words of Susan Friedman, here is what I mean by the paratactical:

> Parataxis – the juxtaposition of things without providing connectives. Parataxis: a common aesthetic strategy in Modernist writing and art, developed to disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality, and perspective. Parataxis: the opposite of hypotaxis in linguistics, thus the opposite of hierarchical relationships of syntactic units. Parataxis: a mechanism of the 'dream work' in Freud's grammar for the unconscious processes of disguised expression of the forbidden, indicating unresolved or conflicting desires. (Friedman 21)

I suspect I'm not the only one who recognises this as a useful description of Kefala's general stylistic approach.

Translation

As stated earlier the English Kefala crafted for herself out of the material presence of other languages has its precedents in the Englishes that emerged out of the postcolonial era. One of the places that this becomes visible is in the area of translation. As the Karalis and Nickas casebook demonstrates, Kefala's work has often been translated and Kefala herself has undertaken the translation discipline. Of note here is Helen Nickas' introduction to the trilingual version of *The Island* that refers back to Kefala's characterisation of her own language usage, 'In hindsight it is obvious that ultimately the author has created a unique style out of the conflict between the two extremes: the baroque and the understatement' (20). Nickas also addresses the question of a potential readership for this translation of *The Island* into three languages – 'the multilingual reader will be getting three readings out of the same text, simultaneously' (22). She does not doubt that such a readership exists both inside and outside Australia. Later in the introduction, Nickas comments on the fact that translation always involves an interpretation; the text is revealed as what it always is – a palimpsest of potential interpretations.

Deconstruction in particular has alerted us to this ever-present destabilising factor within language. Finally Nickas makes the important point that her own existence as a Greek woman outside Greece makes her an ideal translator for a writer who is 'a woman placed outside a so-called mainstream of linguistic activity' (26). This is what I was trying to capture in my last book when I referred to 'accents within writing' which included references to Rey Chow's work and her own references to Derrida, alerting us to Derrida's singular unease in being an Algerian Francophone whose accent was manifest in his spoken French but never in the written version (*Post-Multicultural Writers*).

In the appendix to the Karalis and Nickas casebook a number of translators comment on their interaction with Kefala's work, revealing the ambiguities and limits of mapping one language onto another. In a wonderfully complex essay Saadi Nikro refers to the non-equivalence between languages in terms of a sort of fraying,

> the translator should be prepared to surrender the possessive self to the 'fraying' of both the foreign language and the language of the self, prepared to explore the very foreignness of the self … migrants surrender to the instability of both the language of their background and that of the new. (168)

We might also entertain the notion of the haptic, the touch of language, something Roland Barthes suggests in the phrase 'the grain of the voice'. The synesthetic always resides within language – to touch a language is something that happens more obviously perhaps in relation to music and to its manifestation within language.

Antigone's Laugh: Music and Acoustic Universalism

Music has always been a motif in Kefala's work but has signified many different things. In 'The First Journey' it is attached to the two brothers who travel to the capital to pursue their music

studies that parallel the journey into manhood. By the time of *Alexia* almost a decade later it is linked to a brother, Nicolas, who is forced to relinquish the cello for the construction drill whose mastery the refugee status demands. He descends gradually into the madness that too often awaits the refugee who is prevented from pursuing and articulating his own artistic impulses. Those encounters with crumbling mental structures are an element that has also punctuated the 'migrant aesthetic' where mental health issues proliferate, particularly in the declining years: for example, Raimond Gaita's memoirs concerning his parents who are both undone by the fragility of their mental health; Felicity Castagna's recent novel *No More Boats* catalogues the mental breakdown of an aging Italian immigrant. Fragile mental health and the affect this generates has always been a part of Modernism as well, not least in the Modernist archive occupied by psychoanalysis. In a manner that connects poetry and music in a continuous acoustic kinship system, Kefala cites Nadezda Mandelstam, '"One imagines that for a poet auditory hallucinations are something in the nature of an occupational disease"' (*Sydney Journals* 77). But there is also an uncomplicated way in which music and 'tonality', as Kefala often terms it, is present as a recurrent motif that runs through her work. This is also exposed in the cadences when the poet reads her own work (and I hope there are many recordings of such intrinsically ephemeral events). One wishes as well that her work be set to music. I felt this in particular in *Fragments* whose distilled evocations cry out for further musical settings.

Dwelling on this aspect of tone and voice, one of the major ways in which Kefala has contributed something utterly innovative to Australian literature is that the singular 'grain of her voice' has been developed with infinite patience over her oeuvre. The protagonist/author has developed the details of a voice that aspires to a new typology for what we could call (perhaps a little too generally) a migrant aesthetic. The voice associated with I/we is preceded by a long engagement with the materiality of English in order to fashion the spare paratactical style that is now more

evident in a retrospective view across her work. Echoing Nickas' comment, it represents an engagement with English arising out of an experience of displacement across other languages – mobilising only those aspects of the English language that are able to express those complex affects and emotions, those sensations and feelings, that are adequate for representing that experience. I am suggesting that it is both singular (unique) and part of a typology, a classificatory system. It is a process that critics like myself have also attempted to enable (over the decades) by trying to find appropriate transnational theoretical coordinates that would support the arguments we made for including multilingualism, an awareness of other languages beyond English, in considerations of Australian literature and culture more broadly.

In relation to this, if one examines Kefala's own comments on the baroque element in her writing this might be interpreted not simply as arbitrary or expendable ornamentation (a traditional meaning for baroque) but as something that acts as a mise-en-abyme, a key to interpretation that plays on rhetorical sophistication and playfulness. For example, with respect to one of the challenges facing this publication of translating the singular exchanges of the symposium – particular personalities interacting in a specific time and place – into a printed version that inevitably effaces the performativity of the individuals, how might one retain this dynamic, sharpened by the fact that the artist herself was palpably absent? We were all in conversation with Antigone Kefala, or rather with various aspects of her projected through her textual variations. We were also interacting and conversing with each other in the manner of mutually sustaining networks that have existed over several decades. There was as well the continuing challenge of catching one's audience's interest in a live presentation. One of the aspects of this theatricality that one learns to implement over the years lies in the construction of the presentation itself and the invocation of what one might call a pedagogical conceit – a sustained metaphor that functions as a vehicle for a pedagogical argument because it is such conceits that

register affectively and remain in the memory of an audience and, if one is lucky, carry over to a reader.[12] Although such extended metaphors function to carry a rhetorical logic that underpins a more overt argument, they are often difficult to get past the conventions attached to an academic essay which is expected, in a way, to be all surfaces.

Community

Finally we come to the question that is always associated with groups marginalised by dominant cultures, languages etc. There is the idea that this work belongs to and is only relevant to 'the community', whoever they are. In some respects the Karalis and Nickas casebook is evidence of the Greek Australian community's profound interest in and support of Kefala's work but what I've tried to show in referring to its various approaches is how relevant such a collection is to many other communities and to Australian literature in general. George Kanarakis' essay situates Kefala's work in relation to a global (and not just local) Greek diaspora and describes her as 'a true child of the Greek diaspora' beginning with her own birth into a Greek community marooned in Romania (247) as well as demonstrating how her work is networked across that diaspora in a globalised manner. I wondered as well about the movement between first-person singular and plural in her work, what is the nature of the dynamics between the use of 'I' and 'we' across her writing? For example, I prefaced my re-reading of *Sydney Journals* by perusing Peter Carey's *30 Days in Sydney* (part of the Bloomsbury series 'The Writer and the City') and its celebration of a resolutely male mateship to situate a particular version of Sydney. The highlighting of this specific network revealed the absence of other networks of the kind that have supported 'migrant' writers across the decades. Such support groups are vital but need to be researched – they may collect around journals, publishers, galleries etc. and cannot simply be equated with language groups. The Karalis and Nickas casebook

is a good example of what such research might look like, as is the gathering of different participants for the symposium.

I also noted that the ways in which the refugee condition appears throughout her work resonates with the predicament of refugees and asylum seekers now, although that continuity is not always acknowledged by those who participate in contemporary cultural activism (*The Island* 20; *Alexia* 10; *Sydney Journals* 86). How that experience travels across generations and contributes to a complex awareness of ethnicity (a link to other languages and cultures) is carefully parsed by Nikro in a review of the anthology *On Being Lebanese in Australia*. Nikro explores how ethnicity operates as a network whose intricate web produces and differentially distributes certain forms of social and symbolic capital that can be subjectively 'accumulated' and objectively deployed, towards maintaining the viability of self-constitution and social exchange:

> It is only through such a theoretical lens that the question concerning how a so-called 'first-generation' migrant learns to transpose what had been assumed as a national identity (Lebanese) into what should now be lived up to as an ethnic identity (Lebanese) a question the scope of which makes no sense when ethnicity is regarded as some one's 'cultural heritage'. Or the question concerning how some Australians (the so-called 'second generation') have to somehow get used to their identity being split between national and ethnic imaginaries, belongings or political registers.
>
> What the authors have managed to do is to concentrate on the messiness encompassed by the transitive drift of what can be termed transposition, without reducing the complexities to a set of predetermined concepts as mere currencies of intellectual investment and exchange. (103)

Conclusion

Antigone Kefala appeared in my life in the early 1980s when I had just produced an anthology of non-Anglo-Celtic Australian writers as part of material for a course on Narratology where students were asked to conduct interviews with family members and friends to research the Depression and were exposed to different genres of writings on that period. Since I knew that someone like myself would have problems doing this assignment I suggested a parallel component dealing with postwar migration. Having to provide other material around this topic led to my opening that can of worms in Australian literature – migrant literature (regarded at that time as an oxymoron). In 1984 Kefala, as part of her work at the Australia Council, convened two weekends in Sydney and Melbourne on Writing in Multicultural Australia (Delaruelle, Ward and Karakostas-Seda). Much activity followed and it is true that in the early 1980s we did believe that somehow simply exposing all that talent that was part of Australian culture would eventually change the cultural compass points. I think it has and we should not lose sight of the ways in which Antigone Kefala has created a community of those who know of each other's work and whose networks stretch far beyond this island nation. In part this was through her efforts on the Australia Council – something that has not been fully assessed as yet – as well as in her own artistic work. There is a demonstrable receptivity here to these other languages and the cultural traditions that attend them. The Karalis and Nickas volume is a tangible example of what can be done and reveals the affection and respect as well as nuanced interpretations of a significant writer in our midst. Tribute must also be paid to Ivor Indyk's complex and wide-ranging contribution to this effort to open up Australian letters to these other influences through *Heat*, through the Writing and Society group at the University of Western Sydney and through Giramondo Press.

As cited earlier, scholars such as Nikro and those who gathered to discuss and celebrate Kefala's work at New Australian

Modernities: Antigone Kefala and Australian Migrant Aesthetics, the symposium which gave rise to this collection, show us the way that we should be able to delve into the complexities and contradictions of the 'migrant aesthetic' and to leave the monolithic presences behind that are to some extent always constructed when dealing with 'the national culture'. To invoke 'the' Greek Community as though it, too, were a homogenous entity should no longer be the default position. We are no longer in the territory of 'museums of identity' as I mentioned in a recent paper for the *Sydney Review of Books* ('Museums of Identity'). On the other hand, the model of Australian literature that I've tried to construct here continues to expose its disconcerting uncanny spaces, its spectral dwelling with glass floors as invoked in the Kefala poem with which I began.

One of the ways of describing 'Australian Migrant Aesthetics' is to suggest that it comprises the wielding of hammers in order to shatter the delusions concerning the smooth façade of a national culture and it does this by means of the simple technique of pointing to other realities articulated in other languages. Such realities contain many edifying moments of joy that Kefala's work clearly achieves but it also undermines a prevailing notion that a culture or national consensus regarding aesthetics exists in only one language or version of a language: English and Englishes. We continue to hope that future studies of Modernism/Modernity in Australia will include the inflections and influences of the other languages that have always already been present in Australia.

Notes

1 Boochani won both the Victorian Prize for Literature and the Victorian Premier's Prize for Nonfiction as well as a special award in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards in 2019. See also Olubas and, for a dissenting approach, Franklin.

2 An exception to this is the work of Mary Besmeres and Anna Wierzbicka who have both explored bilingualism in Australia.

3 See my discussion of Derrida's shame at his Algerian accent in Gunew, *Post-Multicultural Writers*, pp. 101–2.

4 See also Gunew, 'Museums of Identity and Other Identity Thefts' and 'Uncomfortable Cosmopolitanism: Incorporating Multiculturalisms', both 2018. My argument tempers earlier definitions of cosmopolitanism attributed, for example, to Diogenes that cosmopolitanism indicated that we are all 'citizens of the world'. Kwame Anthony Appiah built on this approach in his 2006 publication, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, which helped generate the neo-cosmopolitan debates of the last two decades.

5 I also note that the book is held in only eight libraries in Australia, something I trust will be rectified in the wake of the New Australian Modernities symposium and this publication on Kefala.

6 You could say it inspired my own riposte to Simon Patton's review of Kefala's *Fragments* in *Sydney Review of Books* although, unlike the Indyk example, Patton's response ordered me in time-honoured misogynist fashion to 'hold my tongue'. https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review-review-correspondence/

7 For more on this monolingualism from the point of view of language policies in Australian universities see Baldwin. As she states in her conclusion, 'A key example is the persistent monolingual mindset of many decision-makers and for Australians more generally that, despite official rhetoric, English is the only language Australia needs for its global engagement' (212).

8 Tim Bonyhady's *Good Living Street: The Fortunes of My Viennese Family* (2011) gives a wonderfully detailed account of how this Modernism entered in terms of fine art. See also Sybille Smith's *Mothertongue* for a superb evocation of European (including linguistic) displacement in Australia from the late 1930s onwards.

9 For more on this see Carter.

10 A good beginning to what that might look like is the Mycak and Sarwal anthology.

11 See Michael Tsianikas' analysis of *Alexia* in Karalis and Nickas.

12 An example that springs to mind is Steven Greenblatt's title *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (2011). My own publications have always tried to use the pedagogical conceit because it defines my own critical processes: *Framing Marginality* (1994); *Haunted Nations* (2004) and if I'd had my way, 'The Future Anterior or Back to the Future', a title that was 'purged' by the publisher of my 2017 volume. The pedagogical conceit I attempted to work with in this essay was that of the uncanny house that exposes its fragility through repeated demolitions and renovations, as is often the case with building a national literature.

Works cited

Ahmad, Dohra, ed. *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology*. New York, Norton, 2007.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York, Norton, 2006.

Baldwin, Jennifer Joan. *Languages other than English in Australian Higher Education*. Cham, Springer, 2019 (Language Policy series, vol. 17) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05795-4_9

Besmeres, Mary and Anna Wierzbicka, eds. *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures*. St Lucia, UQP, 2007.

Boochani, Bherouz. *No Friend But the Mountains*. Sydney, Pan Macmillan, 2018.

Bonyhady, Tim. *Good Living Street: The Fortunes of My Viennese Family*. Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2011.

Brett, Judith. 'The Process of Becoming: Antigone Kefala's The First Journey and The Island'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 126–37.

Brown, Lachlan. '"All the Village was Running": Some Voices from Young Refugees'. Kirkpatrick and Dixon, 2012, pp. 267–78.

Carey, Peter. *30 Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account*. London, Bloomsbury, 2001.

Carter, David. 'Literary, But Not Too Literary; Joyous, But Not Jazzy: Triad Magazine, Antipodean Modernity and the Middlebrow'. *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2018, pp. 245-67.

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2004.

Castagna, Felicity. *No More Boats*. Artarmon, Giramondo, 2017.

Castro, Brian. 'Detours and Divagations: Consciousness, Otherness and Hospitality', ASAL Patron's Lecture, UNSW, 14 March 2019. https://meanjin.com.au/blog/detours-and-divagations/

Chow, Rey. *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2014.

Delaruelle, Jacques, Anna Ward and Alexandra Karakostas-Seda, eds. *Writing in Multicultural Australia 1984: An Overview*. Sydney, Australia Council, 1985.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. Patrick Mensah. Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 1998.

Digby, Jenny. 'Antigone Kefala: A Labyrinthian Linguistic Field'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 31–44.

Dixon, Robert and Brigid Rooney, eds. *Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?* Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013.

Franklin, Roger. 'Rules? The Left Grants Itself Immunity', *Quadrant Online*, 4 February 2019. https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/qed/2019/02/rules-the-left-grants-itself-immunity/

Friedman, Susan S. *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations of Modernity Across Time*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2015.

Gaita, Raimond. *Romulus My Father*. Melbourne, Text Publishing, 1998.

—— *After Romulus*. Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2011.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor, U of Michigan Press, 2010.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, New York, Norton, 2011.

Gunew, Sneja. *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*. London & New York, Routledge, 2004.

—— *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators*. London, Anthem, 2017.

—— 'Museums of Identity and Other Identity Thefts', *Sydney Review of Books*, 31 July 2018. https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/museums-of-identity-and-other-identity-thefts/

—— 'Uncomfortable Cosmopolitanism: Incorporating Multiculturalisms', Migrating Concepts: Cosmopolitanism, Multiculturalism and Conviviality Across the Asia Pacific. Journal for Intercultural Studies Conference, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, 23–24 February 2018.

—— '"From a speculative point of view I wondered which of us I was": Rereading Old Women'. *Re-reading The Monstrous-Feminine: Art, Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Nicholas Chare, Jeanette Hoorn and Audrey Yue. London & New York, Routledge, 2019.

—— *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1994.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London & New York, Routledge, 1988.

Indyk, Ivor. 'The Journals of Antigone Kefala'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 221–33.

Kanarakis, George. 'Antigone Kefala: A Genuine Literary Voice in the Antipodes'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 245–53.

Karalis, Vrasidas. 'The Poetics of Ellipsis in Antigone Kefala's Poetry.' Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 254–71.

Karalis, Vrasidas and Helen Nickas, eds. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*. Brighton, Owl Press, 2013.

Kefala, Antigone. *The Alien*. Sydney, Makar, 1973.

—— *The First Journey: Two Short Novels*. Glebe, Wild and Woolley, 1975.

—— *Thirsty Weather*. Sydney, Outback Press, 1978.

—— *The Island*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1984.

—— *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*. Sydney, John Ferguson, 1984.
—— 'Towards a Language'. *Displaced Persons*, edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. Dangaroo Press, 1988, pp. 75–82. Reprinted in Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 21–9.
—— *European Notebook*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988.
—— *Absence: New and Selected Poems*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1992, 1998.
—— *Summer Visit: Three Novellas*. Artarmon, Giramondo, 2002.
—— *The Island/L'Île/To nisi*. Trans. Marie Gaulis and Helen Nickas. Brighton, Owl Publishing, 2002.
—— *Sydney Journals*. Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.
—— *Fragments*. Sydney, Giramondo, 2016.
Kirkpatrick, Peter and Robert Dixon, eds. *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia*. Sydney University Press, 2012.
Mays, Kyle. *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America*. Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2018.
Minestrelli, Chiara. *Australian Indigenous Hip Hop: The Politics of Culture, Identity and Spirituality*. London & New York, Routledge, 2016.
Mirmohamadi, Kylie. 'The "Federation of Literary Sympathy": The Australasian Home Reading Union'. Kirkpatrick and Dixon, 2012, pp. 17–26.
Mycak, Sonia and Amit Sarwal, eds. *Australian Made: A Multicultural Reader*. Sydney University Press, 2010.
Nickas, Helen. 'Antigone Kefala'. *Migrant Daughters: The Female Voice in Greek-Australian Prose Fiction*, Brighton, Owl Publishing, 1992, pp. 91–124.
—— 'Introduction to the Text – in English'. Kefala, *The Island/L'Île/To nisi*. 2002, pp. 13–29.
Nikro, Saadi. 'Antigone Kefala: Translating the Migratory Self.' Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 162-70.
—— 'On Being Lebanese in Australia: Identity, Racism and the Ethnic Field,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2013, pp. 102–14.
Olubas, Brigitta. '"We Forgot our Names"' *Public Books*, 21 March 2019. https://www.publicbooks.org/we-forgot-our-names/
Radford, Kristian. 'Antigone Kefala: Alien Poet'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 199–204.
Smith, Sybille. *Mothertongue*. Sydney, Vagabond Press, 2016.
Tsianakas, Michael. 'Alexia: Antigone Kefala's Overdue Fairytale.' Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 171–187.

2

The Geography of Soul

Angelo Loukakis

In prose and poetry, Antigone Kefala's work does not ignore the real, but allows it its due and no more. She does not purvey such fictionalised journalism as was, and is, expected of writers with a migrant background – some ethnically inflected version of Patrick White's 'dun-coloured realism'. Her eye is instead on that which connects or alienates, the tissue that joins the human to the street, our movement between places and across spaces, others' natures and her own. While acutely acknowledging the social and its habitations, Antigone seeks other, more expansive dimensions for her art.

For our corporeal bodies, the room may be a place of safety, or one of imprisonment – not only of the physical being but of the spirit. The road may be a source of danger, or a means to freedom. So, too, the spaces of the city. Women know these

paradoxes well. Antigone knows them well. These actualities cannot be ignored or disappeared by acts of will or cognition. But if they are as solid as the stone old Sam Johnson was purported to have kicked in refuting the philosopher Berkeley, they are also – as Berkeley argued – only as real as the feelings we have in relation to them.

It is a signature of Antigone Kefala's work to so effectively position her particular worlds of feeling among quotidian and natural spaces. After the devastation of war at the beginning of 'The First Journey', narrator Alexi tells of what he sees from a train: 'outside the towns we ran through open country. Burnt orange, dark brown country stretching forever. Free. The land could not be destroyed … The taste of the open fields exhilarating as ever' (7). 'The taste of the open fields' so very welcome to the narrator at war's end is here vividly rendered as a kind of vivid, bodily sensation.

But then a little later on comes Alexi's sensation of being 'suddenly trapped' in the 'lighted cage' of the relocated Conservatorium and Drama School, where the only relief lies in the music therein. Music, that 'miracle forever renewed and unexplained … Our lives improbable, our streets improbable, only this – THIS – its reality stronger than anything' (19, 18).

Antigone's rooms are stages for all manner of emotions, as we see in the awkward, difficult reunion with mother and father that follows: 'I was trying to fit again into the silence of the house and of the rooms that did not contain me any longer' (30–1). But against this sense of containment the city also has its pleasures: 'I loved the city, and above all the space. The space filled me with a constant exhilaration' (54). 'To mother only I used to write about the city … I used to walk home at night, alone through the white streets' (55).

The room, the road and the city are too often assigned banal or generic meanings in literature, at least in the poorer sort. Not so in Antigone's work, where these spaces operate beyond routine simile, metaphor or motif to perform an important metonymic

function. Working with the stuff of a given world as well as her vision of that world, Antigone's poetry manages place and space as context *and* as meaning. But of course that big and overwhelming sphere beyond our own selves is not easily grasped, let alone remade – not without the work of dreaming, that is …

Sneja Gunew (2002) appositely refers to the dream in Antigone's oeuvre. In her referencing of dreams, the poet is not alone. We each dream our self into being, and we do so daily. Awake or asleep, by day, month or year, we constantly create the kind of person we wish to be – an artist, someone's child, a friend – and imagine those things that 'the person who is me' will go on to do. We may form or dissolve our dreams as so much mental footage, yet this dreaming requires more than autonomous will. We need some locus for the imagining required to build our myths – a place to stand in order to become.

I imagine Antigone entering the room of a dream, having brought in from the road or the city all manner of perceptions and feelings – that miasma of doubts, things half-understood, perfectly understood, not understood at all. And I watch on as she strives to give breath to what lies within. She does this not with an eye to producing a convincing invention, the type of story that an imagined reader might find believable, but to create a story in which she herself – the writer, the poet – can firstly believe.

Antigone is a fine writer, but for me also a 'figure in a landscape'. I mean *literally* a figure in a landscape. I've known her since her Australia Council days – and have seen or encountered her on the streets where she's lived, streets not that far from my own, for something like forty years now. Some things we certainly share including, perhaps paradoxically, our separate versions of 'Greekness' (remembering that all forms of diasporic Greekness are versions, according to the imagined centre in the Balkans).

But whatever our differences I'll be bold and say we also have experiences in common.

Antigone began to write in the early 1960s at a time when a distinct bifurcation began to emerge in writing and publishing in Australia. The 'old' publishers, the Cassells and Rigbys, the Angus and Robertsons and so on, insisted on doing what they'd always done, while the writing they published began to look more and more dated. Over the next few years, however, new possibilities appeared for full-length publication as a number of small presses and poetry publishers gained traction – Outback Press, Wild & Woolley, UQP, Makar and others. Whether you got a guernsey as an 'ethnic' or a 'multicultural' didn't seem to matter so much, as now you could at least be published. Antigone was a beneficiary of those changes; so was I.

Antigone's poetry found favour from very early on with the new breed of publishers mentioned (some of whom are fortunately still operating, as we see from her most recent book, published by Giramondo). The quality could not be ignored or dismissed, the voice was entirely distinctive, and these publishers helped build a readership for it. In my own case, some writing momentum finally arrived in 1973 when my short stories began to be accepted by the 'little', then bigger, literary magazines. All was consequent to finding a style and voice of my own, towards which Antigone's work played an important role.

The sophistication of her writing – so not conventionally 'Australian', so 'non-Eng Lit' – led down other paths. I'd already had a sense that the folksy realism I'd latched onto at high school would eventually, given the literary training I was acquiring and my wayward impulses generally, lead to a dead end. By contrast, I believe Antigone had seen that potential dead end much earlier than I did and seemed to have avoided it. Her writing spoke to me in many ways, but among them were 'try harder', 'let go', 'don't be afraid'.

The way she handled her material, the atmospheres and tension she was able to capture, constituted a writing course all on its

own. She viewed and wrote character and behaviour through unclouded European eyes and a knowing and sophisticated angle on the universe. For her learning as well as her writerly productions and observations, she was a great literary model. Alongside the work she was publishing, her presence as a literary creator was personally very reassuring to me – after all, these were still very early days for people with surnames like ours, who were also crazy enough to call themselves writers in a society that had quite sclerotic notions as to who counted as such.

Antigone was a child of war; and she, like so many others who left Europe post–World War II, had the many difficulties of migration to negotiate. My sister and I were in another kind of boat – our parents were immigrants who had separately brought a legacy of hurts to Australia and who, inevitably if unwillingly or unwittingly, went on to visit these hurts on their children. For me as for Antigone, there was a great deal that needed saying about what had passed, was still passing – and that needed imagining or reimagining in whatever form of art or genre of literature we could manage or found congenial.

Here are a few lines from 'Memory' in *The Alien* collection (1973) later collected in *Absence*, which may as well have been written for my mother or my father, or for a proverbial million other migrants:

> You that had lost the image and the way,
> had lost now even recollection of the way,
> and wandered through the broken walls,
> in that far country,
> and sometimes in a stray sunray, some meaning
> of the past would come to you, in strange blue shapes,
> and then before our blind eyes,
> the crystal vision of the world would rest untouched.
> (*Absence* 23)

These lines convey a decidedly Modernist (and very Greek Modernist at that) sense of poetic vocabulary – the sense that cannot abandon the beautiful clarity and force of the ancient language. The nouns and their qualifiers – 'image', 'way', 'walls', 'far country, 'blue shapes', 'blind eyes' – are clean and powerful, and they perform as strongly in English as they do in Greek. The phrase 'you that had lost' is entirely redolent of the effects of Greece's history, a sense of loss that I suggest is also alive today in anyone touched by contemporary Greek experience. This is poetry as a special but also common language.

If Australia's 'generation of 68' had their models and inspirational voices in American poetry, I suggest Antigone had other and further spurs and purposes. She is certainly of a generation of writers who knew well and understood Seferis' resonant declaration: 'Everywhere I travel, Greece wounds me' (Seferis 107). Whether his role was self-declared or assigned to him by others, Seferis of course played an enormous role in a critical nation-making period in Greece's history (or perhaps more accurately, *yet another* nation-making era in that country's history). His poetry's melding of past and present, the reimagining and conscription of Greek mythology to attend to the prosaic present, was a magisterial achievement that has long been inspirational for poets within and outside Greece.

As an heir to Seferis and many other poetry streams and currents, Antigone has conducted her own distinctive explorations into the obliqueness and obtuseness of time. The poem 'The Place' gives an idea of this. Here the context is a not-too-distant war, where the after-effects on the victims and their experience of that war are given contemporary detail, but where the language and rhythms also evoke a classical idea of returning cycles of life.

II
'The ships, we had heard, had sunk
weighed with the charity of the new world
that kept on feeding us with toys…'

IV
We travelled in old ships
with small decaying hearts
rode on the giant beast
uncertain
remembered other voyages
and the black depths
each day we feasted on the past
friends watching over
the furniture of generations
dolphins no longer followed us
we were in alien waters
(*Thirsty Weather* 16)

In the constraints that narrow our journeying, in the power of exile to disrupt meaning and possibility, the poet here – as on other matters – gives us a coherent view of the nature of being. Her art for me always raises ontological questions: what are the component parts of being, how do these relate, or not relate when there is loss, and how do we experience the parts or the whole?

Antigone knows too much to give soothing answers (as in 'the meaning is the journey itself'), and is too tough-minded to expound on the 'universality of experience', or offer solace or consolation as the chief benefit of literary art or music – even if she might agree there is some. She has lived too much history to naively propose the power of literature to change the world. But with writing and insights of quality, there's every chance a person might change – and people change the world. Whatever else, I'm confident that writing like this enlarges understanding and nourishes readers' capacity to *be* in the world. However provisionally, and whatever our individual contingencies.

In making her way as writer and poet, Antigone has decidedly avoided the persona or title of Artist with a capital A. We know her contributions include working as a teacher and administrator. We should also appreciate that such work has informed her

writing, as have her relationships with others, as has study, reading, listening, as have migration and travels. The material world makes its demands, but this artist argues equal status for that world's most insistent antagonist and counterpart, the inner life. Held as they are in unique creative tension, Antigone's has arranged the polarities to generate a form of linguistic light that cannot help but illuminate.

What has Antigone Kefala given us in her words? I will say that she has afforded us the pleasure of a unique voice and an original kind of knowledge. In fiction, poetry and prose, she has fearlessly and imaginatively gone about identifying all manner of inclines and declines, of landscapes large and small, within and beyond herself. In the end she has delivered us a set of original maps, an atlas of artful words in which we discover features previously unknown, or if known, here presented through other eyes. Her gift is a vivid, precise and moving geography of soul.

Works cited

Kefala, Antigone. *The Alien*. Sydney, Makar Press, 1973.

—— *The First Journey*. Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *Thirsty Weather*. Melbourne, Outback Press, 1978.

—— *Absence: New and Selected Poems*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1992, 1998.

Gunew, Sneja. 'On *Summer Visit: Three Novellas* (Giramondo, 2002) in *Australian Feminist Studies* vol. 18, no. 42, November 2003'. In *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas, Brighton, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 109–12.

Seferis, George. 'In the Manner of G. S.' *George Seferis: Collected Poems, 1924–1955*, translated and edited by Edmund Keeley and P Sherrard, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 107–11.

3

Worldly Interiors in the Fiction of Antigone Kefala

Elizabeth McMahon

From her first two novellas, published as *The First Journey* (1975), to the most recent collection, *Summer Visit* (2002), the prose fiction of Antigone Kefala is laden with scenes of interiors. These halls, rooms and studios are sometimes located in public institutions as in the Bucharest conservatorium and drama school in the title story of *The First Journey* and the university and offices of Wellington, New Zealand, in *The Island*. Mostly, Kefala's interiors are domestic residences and include dwellings that house intergenerational and extended families, the abodes of friends, the communal accommodation provided for refugees, the private room. In each domain, public and private, the interior spaces of Kefala's fiction are negotiations of possible inhabitations in the world, of home.

The metaphorics of the domestic interior and the psyche are ancient – indeed they constitute an 'absolute metaphor' in Hans Blumenberg's sense of being a 'foundational [element] of philosophical language' (3), by which he means an historical but nonetheless irreducible figure that undergirds our thought. So, too, Bachelard's phenomenology of the house's intimate, concrete and imaginary spaces discovers in the domestic dwelling a 'portal to metaphors of the imagination', 'a metaphor of humanness' (Stilgoe viii, vii). Identifying the house as the child's first cosmos, Bachelard traces, inter alia, the psychic and bodily imprints of scale, orientation from the miniature to enormity, the single room as/to the world. It is the space of shelter yet also of possible expansion as the subject reconstitutes and transforms herself in contemplation, reverie and imaginative attention. Kefala's protagonists dwell in and pass through such rooms, Ur-spaces of identity formation, the spatialised coordinates of subjective possibility and limitation.

In *The Arcades Project* (1927–40) Walter Benjamin historicises the ancient metaphor of the domestic dwelling in view of its particular significance in and for the Western Modernity of the nineteenth century. He argues that the domestic interiors of bourgeois dwellings became correlatives of the imagined interior lives of their inhabitants, even the active co-producers of their subjectivities. The house became 'a receptacle of the person', a space that 'encases' the dweller, a construction of interiority itself; Mme Caragea, the protagonist's first love in 'The First Journey', lives and dies in this kind of nineteenth-century room, for example. Further, as Georg Lukács famously set out in *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), Modernity's loss of a transcendental grid to locate and encompass the subject in both world and cosmos produced a sense of homelessness and the attendant need to feel at home everywhere (41).

This complex of connections between self, homelessness and the bourgeois dwelling are made clear in the classic of nineteenth-century literature, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), when the

heroine and narrator, Lucy Snow, an orphan and émigré in France, wakes in an unfamiliar room after a nervous breakdown. The text devotes two pages to Lucy's painstaking list of the objects in the room, as she assesses their reality, substance and context and tries to summon herself back into the world, life and society. Brontë's narrator has to remake the world from what is in front of her, seeking points of recognition, at a generic level at least, and negotiate a position for herself amongst the objects in the room, which is her new world. Lucy is born into a new chapter of life, that of the European bourgeois family home and its production of the interior life of its inhabitants. As such, Lucy's reawakening is a primal scene of self-constitution enacted in relation to the bourgeois interior. In the colonial context and announced by the texts' titles, Kefala's female protagonists of 'The Boarding House' and *The Island* also negotiate interior spaces in their labours of self-creation.

Lukács' and Benjamin's texts are themselves woven into the tumultuous history of the two world wars: Lukács' preface to the 1962 edition of *Theory of the Novel* details his original motivations and objectives when writing the essays that became the first edition at the outbreak of World War I; and Benjamin's *Arcades Project* remained uncompleted because of his death in 1940 in flight from the Nazis. Writing in the period between the wars, Benjamin laments the demise of the deep connection between self and the interior in the twentieth century, when, he argues, the link between inhabitant and dwelling place had been lost. Instead, he writes, spaces have assumed the 'porosity of transparency' evacuated of the human subject, evident variously in the architectural transformations of Bauhaus and Le Corbusier and the visual art of High Modernism such as the evacuated spaces of de Chirico (Benjamin 220).

Kefala's texts are also explicitly bound up with the violent history of the twentieth century, the facticity and metaphorics of homelessness and interior spaces. Kefala's personal history presents an overdetermined instance of twentieth-century homelessness:

personal, historical, philosophical and literary. Her family were part of the Greek diaspora resident in Romania from the mid-nineteenth century; by her own description, it is a community of the cultural bourgeoisie. They became refugees in Greece then New Zealand after World War II, when Romania was occupied by the Soviets, and, finally, Kefala migrated to Australia in 1959. Her fiction charts movement across the globe and traverses various time zones from Coordinated Universal Time to specific coordinates within the multiple historical times of modernity in operation at any given moment: Romania of childhood; war-torn Romania and Greece, Modernist Europe; postwar New Zealand and Australia. The interior spaces of her fiction are charged with the overlays of these multiple migrations and the particular historical transformations Benjamin observes regarding dwelling places and the inner life of the subject.

This personal-historical experience is compounded further by the postcolonial context of Kefala's scene of writing, Sydney, where the concept of home and interiority is always double-edged. For the very concept of an Australian 'home' is predicated on dispossession, the act of constructing homelessness on homeland. So, too, it was built on the forced migration of unfree labour and the settler culture's particular sense of belonging – and not belonging – to two homes, old and new. This duality is compounded further when the migrant does not share the language, history or ethnicity of the dominant culture. As Helen Nickas documents, this may produce a more intense bifurcation and/or an increased scope and range of perspective relative to the mainstream (188). Finally, and however various these originary cultures might be, all are called by the Imperial Home at the level of colony, then commonwealth and nation. The negotiation of this complexity – impossibility – is a foundational trope and *topos* of Australian literature, one shared with other colonial literatures. In Australia it has been challenged more recently by the renaissance and wide distribution of First Nations' literature and the diversity of Australia's transnationality since the war,

including the writing of Antigone Kefala. This shift is liberating for the culture and the literature. It short-circuits the production of ever more compacted binaries and dualisms. It expands the worlds within Australia and develops its capacity to engage in the worlds of others.

The interior scenes in Kefala's novellas are integral to her project of world-making, of creating spaces for the possible inhabitation of her personae and subjects who are informed by this impossible complex of forces that render them exposed in and to the world. There are many scenes across her fiction in which the characters are not only affected but shaped by rooms and where characters negotiate the movement between interior and exterior spaces: thresholds, imprisonment, intimacy and security. There is not a master code that unlocks the meaning of these spaces in Kefala's work, and their meanings and operations are, of course, contingent, but there are shared properties and metaphorics that foreground the centrality of her spatial imagination.

In the terminology of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Kefala's fiction reveals a quest for 'spheres' of inhabitation, spaces and cultures that provide 'immunity' from the 'monstrosity' of the world. These spheres do not presume hermetic isolation – or even imagine such a state is possible. They are, rather, osmotic and mediated, like a membrane. Sloterdijk argues in *Neither Sun nor Death* that these spheres of habitation and creativity protect against depressive states, where the individual is rendered incapable of expansion (259), as we see in Brontë's *Villette* and repeatedly in Kefala's prose. In her description of her marriage in 'The Boarding House', Melina writes of her fury when, after she has created the room for conversation, she 'watch[ed] her husband enlarge in the space that I had offered' (*First Journey* 100). Vincent Duclos summarises Sloterdijk's thesis that the act of sphere-building 'represents a perpetual effort to surmount the indifference of the world – an indifference experienced as a '*loss of world*' (52). Marriage, often imagined as a shelter in the world, renders Melina incapable of creativity and expansion. She can

only facilitate the space and possibility of another who is unaware and indifferent to her need for the same. 'The Boarding House' and, later, 'Intimacy' depict the intense depressive states that result.

Kefala's novellas present a document of ongoing invention in and of specific places, of real and conceptual shelters in the world. These include experiences where the relationship between interior and exterior worlds is too discordant, where the equal necessities of intimacy and distance are unbalanced, rendering inhabitation impossible and prompting depressive states and the urgent need for escape. They also record the labour of creating habitable spaces, where these relationships and coordinates between the subject, community and space can be organised to offer a sustaining and sustainable possibility, a way of Being-in-the-world (Heidegger).[1] The following readings analyse a number of scenes from the novellas to identify key qualities of Kefala's spatial imaginary by which these worlds and their inhabitants are made and unmade.

'The First Journey', Kefala's first published prose work, begins with the train journey of two brothers, Alexi and Tassos Cavadia, from their home (presumably the small city of Brăila on the Danube, where Kefala grew up) to Bucharest through a landscape ravaged by the war. The scene prompts the narrator, young Alexi, to describe the terror of the bombings in his homeplace. He then writes of the end of the war and the current Soviet occupation of Romania: 'Now all this had all ended. They had all gone and the others had come' (10). Interspersed in the account of the war are Alexi's vivid recollections of neighbours and town life. Amongst these is the funeral of Mrs Marinescu, a woman who spent twenty years shut up in her house after the death of her son, confident her death by grief was imminent for the entire period. In her will she disappointed living friends and relatives by instructing that her fortune be spent on the construction of a marble statue to Death. In another terminal delay, Alexi records that this monument was yet to be built.

Looking across Kefala's complete oeuvre some forty-five years since its first publication, the interwoven accounts of the war and

Mrs Marinescu read as a kind of Ur-scene for Kefala's prose. The oeuvre begins with a scene of transit full of anticipation in the wake of the monstrosity of war and occupation, and a climate of 'fear' and 'terror'. Juxtaposed with this acute uncertainty and mobility is the hermetically enclosed life of Mrs Marinescu, trapped by its own melancholy and the drama of its performance. Exposure and vulnerability to the world are set alongside hyper-containment as a retreat from the world, a negotiation repeated and re-rehearsed throughout the prose works as swings of the pendulum with their attendant dangers. Ultimately, as *Sydney Journals* (2008) makes so clear in its diary record, interior and exterior worlds can be interwoven in the rhythm of everyday experience; metaphorics and literality can coincide in the daily creation of an artistic life. But earlier in Kefala's career and fiction, when the struggles with consuming gender roles are still to be played out, this possibility remains elusive.

In 'The First Journey', the boys' Bucharest relatives are full of stories of the decline of 'the old world they could not hold on to' (12) since the war. The world needs to be remade. This re-creation occurs when Alexi and Tassos enter the attic bedroom they will share:

> When we went up to our attic it was evening already. The big room was empty and smelt of dry wood. Two beds, a heavy maple table in the middle and a small piano against the far wall. (13)

The spare description mimics the capaciousness of the room in which the few objects are listed and arranged. This room is not the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior described by Benjamin and Brontë, the room filled with objects, the receptacle of the person. On the contrary, it is both more basic and more modern. The description simultaneously depicts postwar austerity, pre-capitalist consumerism and Modernist aesthetics. The objects command an optical tactility, a closeness, that is conveyed chiefly

by Alexi's description of wood in terms of its smell and its genus – intimacies of the body and of knowledge. The bareness of the room also forms an uncluttered, minimalist arrangement, a surrealist emptiness and intensity.[2]

From this upper room, Alexi views the unfolding of the sunset and city at dusk, and the text transitions from sparse account to the poetics of twilight. The world is before him:

> In the obscurity that was falling, through the ceiling windows the blazing colours of the sunset stretched like an immense tapestry of an ungrasped richness, heavy and muted. And slowly, as night fell, it went further and further and further to be engulfed in a stillness so tender and so untouched as if the world were melting into unheard peace. And then the silhouettes of the trees and houses rose solid and opaque.
>
> And I stayed at the open window watching the small flickering lights that stretched far, incredibly far, the air full of the living echoes of the city sprawling at my feet, my heart drunk with half-guessed dreams. (13–14)

The juxtaposition of these two passages presents the co-ordinates by which Kefala habitually maps the world and orients and disorients her subjects or characters: meticulous inventories of objects and of meteorological conditions; descriptions of the quality of light and of atmospheric animation, the shifting lightness and heaviness of the outer world and of inner experience and their materiality and ephemera and their permeability; the seamless movement between the record and poetics of conscious experience and that of the Unconscious as it manifests in dreams.

The threshold of the window is a space of transition in this scene: of twilight – day to night – and of Alexi on the brink of experience, of awakening. In Sloterdijk's terms, Alexi is describing an experience of 'attunement' and 'expansion': 'stretched like an immense tapestry'; 'further and further to be engulfed'; 'stretched

far, incredibly far'.[3] The mobility of the scene not only meets but produces Alexi's sense of opening out to the world. This room is not a site of withdrawal, of bordered privacy away from the world. The timing of the arrival, the dimensions, the scale, uncluttered clarity and perspective of the room and the viewer produce a sense of expansion akin to the Modernist epiphany but an epiphany in motion, a profound moment of Being-in-the-world. This is a moment of *ekstasis*, where Alexi is taken outside himself along the movement of light and landscape; the scene is a portal.[4]

Here, as elsewhere in Kefala's prose, the window is the threshold that connects the interior and exterior worlds in the project of creating habitable spaces in which to live. As thresholds to the outside world, windows enable light, space, beauty – prospects. Further, they enable the subject to join with those qualities. Clearly, this is metaphorical of human experience and the rhythm of expansion and contraction, foray and secession, quotidian life and transportation. Importantly, however, it is also literal in the sense that the subject experiences the somatic sensation of entering *into* the scene just as they are taken *outside* themselves. Moreover, the movement from the interior to the outer is contradictory in that the movement into the world is the most intense inner experience*: ekstasis*. These contradictions and inversions are more than choreography. Their constant interplay reveals their inseparability, their osmotic flow, their mutual constitution. They indicate, as George Steiner reads Heidegger, that 'to be is to be worldly' (85).

Alexi can feel this expansiveness because of the shelter provided by the attic room of his family, their hospitality, culture and embrace, and the opportunities they afford. The ensuing narrative traces Alexi's transformation, as this scene promises it will, but like the deals brokered with the gods in Greek myth, the transformation occurs along a different axis from that anticipated or imagined. Rather than the transformation made possible by musical education and culture, Alexi is transformed by love and

death. Ironically, in this story, the openness and expansiveness of the threshold experience lead to enclosure and feelings of imprisonment.

In stark contrast to the threshold, this imprisonment is rendered in a windowless room when Alexi dreams of the woman he loves, Anna Caragea, who is dying. This room is the closeted dream space of the nineteenth-century interior Benjamin identifies, and is hence anachronistic in the context of the narrative. Alexi dreams of walking through bombed buildings, animated by echoes and changing light, until he comes to a room that contains Anna:

> She took me to the drawing room. The windows were closed. The blinds were drawn. From the ceiling satin curtains, deep brilliant cherry red, fell to the ground. The walls were covered in pink silk with small cherry flowers, there were cushions everywhere, lamps over small tables with large milky glass shades, and books scattered on the carpet, on sofas. The room looked full of details and yet very spacious like a closed world that had not come in touch with anything outside for a long time. (77)

This dark interior overflowing with objects and closed windows is both an image of denied eros and 'a receptacle of the person', a space that 'encases' the dweller as in a prison or a coffin, a site of possessions and of possession. The room is explicitly identified as a 'world', but it is a sphere of inhabitation for M. and Mme Caragea only; Alexi cannot be truly accommodated there. For this is the space of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, a time that is gone; and the married couple are a generation older than Alexi. They, and the room, belong to the past, in a nostalgia that corresponds with Alexi, with the melancholy of his loss of Anna in death. He, as his room shows, is of the postwar period and generation.

Towards the end of 'The First Journey', after Anna has died and Alexi is grief stricken, he is reluctant to leave his attic bedroom during weeks of relentless rain. The room no longer

provides shelter of any kind, for the threshold has mutated to become a border; in a travesty of its earlier manifestation, the portal has become a boundary.

> The houses wet, the trams wet, the corridors dark, a smell of rotting dampness rising from everywhere. In the darkness of the attic I listened to the heavy drops beating down. Then they would stop and in the silence the thunder would strike suddenly, dry as if an immense leather bag had burst in the wind. We were slowly rotting away with her … (81)

The threshold that created a flow between inner and outer domains has become a border between Alexi and the world. In seeming contradiction, this border has, in another sense, broken down, for the weather permeates the interior and death infects life. The complementary elements of osmotic flow and shelter held in perfect balance on the scene of Alexi's arrival have warped into their negative possibilities. Neither Alexi nor the novella end in this condition of disillusionment and despondency. Mirroring Alexi's first, potential-rich threshold experience at the window, 'The First Journey' ends with him looking out of the window once again, this time seeing the awakening season of spring – but now the scene is beset with the ghosts of the dead.

A window is not necessarily a threshold for Alexi's feminine namesake, the eponymous heroine of Kefala's *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children*, published in 1995. Here, too, the window view does not open onto possibility or present prospects. In one scene the young heroine looks through the school window and sees that:

> everything looked very pretty, but empty, as if all the people had deserted the place, had gone underground, waiting for a major bombardment. The eerie silence was like the one she remembered after the sirens had stopped and before the planes had arrived. (66)

Unlike Alexi's experience of expansion into space, Alexia observes vast expanse as emptiness. The landscape does not present future prospects for the narrator but past history. The positive anticipation of possibility of 'First Journey' is replaced with dread. Time and space in *Alexia* and its sequel, *The Island*, are out of joint. In this scene spatial emptiness produces a suspension of time, connecting surely but unexpectedly peacetime New Zealand with wartime Romania. Emptiness is not peacefulness, but is akin to the feeling between siren and bomb-drop – a travesty of anticipation, a temporality of impending catastrophe.

However, this alienation is not a barrier in every sense; or, more correctly, it is Kefala's genius that she transforms the very core of this barrier – language – into the core of her artistic practice. So, too, she deploys the eye of the cultural and linguistic outsider to redefine the limits and possibilities of both. As Michael Tsianikas writes, Alexia's drama centres on her acquisition of English as a migrant in New Zealand. This acquisition is laborious and painful but, as he argues, is an Ur-scene of Kefala's development as a writer (171).

The companion piece to 'The First Journey', 'The Boarding House', is, in a number of ways, a mirror to the earlier story. Where Alexi is inducted into the world and moves from hope to a depressive state, the narrator of 'The Boarding House', named Melina, begins bereft, 'exhausted' and unhoused in the world: 'I feel empty, exposed, going down deserted streets with my small suitcase in the dusk that is falling'.[5] The narrative ends in a direct echo of the opening, but now the mood is jubilant with freedom:

> I walked in the rain, the streets deserted.
> I felt free for the first time. (127)

Set in Sydney in 1959–60, the narrative opens with Melina's arrival in Australia from New Zealand and her walk to the accommodation she has pre-booked. The boarding house is a form of *la maison moralisé*.[6] She writes: 'A mustiness rises out of

the corners. Old age. As if the walls and the lights and the stairs are discouraged.' However, the discouragement of the interior is transformed when Melina opens the bedroom window to reveal another world. As in 'The First Journey', Melina's arrival is at dusk, the dynamic light of twilight:

> The back garden stretches below. Spacious lawns with a tall gum tree whose leaves flicker in the light of the street lamp in the back lane. The sea glistens far below and behind it the city rises, a forest of giant columns covered in embossed plates, glowing warm in the night. Jewels. (87)

Like Alexi's vision but more constrained given Melina's discouragement and exhaustion, the scene is characterised by its capacity of expansion: 'stretches below', 'spacious lawns', 'far below'; and by verticality: 'tall gum', 'the city rises', 'forest of giant columns'. When Melina wakes the next morning, one of her first thoughts is that she should find better lodgings, but then she pulls the blinds and 'the room fills with sunshine' (90). She observes an old lady conversing with her parrot, the scene ending with the bird 'cutting the air with short sharp shrills of joy' (91). Here, the alliterative, monosyllabic onomatopoeia – indeed Melina's capacity to summon the poetic register in the face of her depressive condition – not only expresses but produces the same joy she witnesses: the pulse of an excited heartbeat and the surprise – the thrill – of 'shrill'.

In 'The Boarding House', Melina's capacity for openness and creativity are acts of survival, and the novella is replete with observations that perform the attunement Sloterdijk identifies as necessary to the development of habitable spheres of living. There are many setbacks to this achievement: depression, rage, physical circumstances. But these only clarify the relentless move to creativity and freedom. Tellingly, the final scene occurs outside in torrential rain. Melina is walking alone but in a populous city, solitude and connection are in balance, and the reader is

confident that she has not only located but has built herself a sustainable dwelling place, a way of being in the world.

Read chronologically, there are many years between 'The First Journey' and 'The Boarding House', which *Alexia* and *The Island* can be seen to fill, at least in part. These two New Zealand texts are documents of the interior and the threshold in themselves. Set in Wellington, New Zealand – 'a large island in the South Pacific, south west of Pago Pago', as she writes in *Alexia* (32) – Kefala is not at home in this place. Ironically, she is outside in this insular topography, unhoused, exposed, imprisoned and excluded all at once. While islands operate as sites of containment, of the interior, in the imaginary, this insularity may hinder the interior life. The inhabitant may be too enclosed or too exposed in this recursive, compacted topology of the interior.[7] Alexia asks:

> Was she happy eating her [Miss Prudence, the teacher's] mashed potatoes? Being in her house with the grandfather clock chiming? Happy living on the Island? or Happy living in the World? (100)

Like Russian dolls, the repetition of interiority differentiated only by scale is a topology with which Kefala cannot align. Hers is a continental and urban imaginary from Romania at the crossroads of Central, Eastern and South-eastern European continent to Greece of the Southern European continent, to Australia, the island continent of the Southern Hemisphere. And so, her arrival in Australia by boat through Sydney Heads is not only the endpoint of her journeying for a homeland in which she can live but is experienced as a return to a continental diversity. As she writes in 'Towards a Language':

> AUSTRALIA … AUSTRALIA … we entered Sydney Harbour a summer morning. The colours of the rock wall at the gap were warm apricot, the sun was coming down on

> the waters, the whole landscape shimmering, overflowing with light, with heat, with movement.
>
> I was suddenly released from the greenness, from the rain, the wind, released, at least for the moment, from my inner problems. My past in Romania, in Greece came back as meaningful experience in a landscape that had similar resonances. Sydney seemed alive with people, activity and intellectual excitement. (27)

In this jubilant passage, experience is again cast in terms of inner and outer domains, and the inner life is uplifted by the physical world and its capacity to connect her to the past, which is also a promise of a possible future. Melina records a related experience in 'The Boarding House', when she observes a Russian Orthodox archimandrite and a priest on the bus. She is delighted by the specific connection of personal familiarity but more generally also by the connection afforded by an urban continental diversity. She writes of the archimandrite as having 'a worldly handsomeness' and that she alone of the passengers stares at them 'as someone starved of such sights for a long time' (91).

Perhaps only in this respect, but Kefala's continentality shares qualities with V. S. Naipaul, also an émigré of several displacements between islands and continents, who writes that he could not align self, writing and place on the island of Trinidad, where he was born, but came closer to realising this possibility when he visited the Gangetic Plain of North India, from where his ancestors had travelled in the nineteenth century (2000, 2001). There, in the midst of his subcontinent, he feels that he is no longer between one place and another but within it. Kefala's New Zealand fictions reveal this condition of in-betweenness, not as an enabling mobility and ambiguity but as restlessness and exile.

What she sees as she comes through Sydney Heads in 1959 is a personal possibility. Reading *Sydney Journals* in the wake of this initial vision is to marvel at the daily creativity by which she

makes that happen, never ultimately achieved but continuously practised. These writer's journals presume a firm inner scaffold as a base and move between inner and outer domains: reading, thinking and writing, and a milieu who constitute their civil society. Kefala's vision in 1959 is also a cultural possibility. Here, too, the daily practice of her journal and its record of experience demonstrate how that culture could be made. They demonstrate the necessity to create the present moment in which to dwell. They are the composition of self and world. In the final scene of 'The Boarding House', Melina is fully immersed in this urban exteriority, walking in the city in the midst of a wild storm and drenched to the bone, she has found a habitable world. In that achievement she has also created an openness that makes that world habitable for others.

Notes

1 See Sloterdijk 2012: 'By alluding to the Old German verb *innan*, to inhabit, Heidegger quickly reveals the crux of the existential analytic of spatiality. What he calls Being-in-the-world means nothing other than to "inn" the world in the verbal-transitive sense: to dwell in the world and to enjoy its openness through an initial attunement (*Einstimmung*) and expansion (*Ausgriff*)' (37).

2 Kefala's suspicion of clutter is evident in 'Summer Visit', where she writes of the 'space heaving under the weight of objects – sliver, glass, bric-a-brac' and in tension with the living inhabitants (16).

3 Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*: '[the] threshold (*die Schwelle*) must be sharply differentiated from the border (*die Grenze*). The threshold is a zone. Change, passage, and ebb and flow are embedded in the word *schwellen* ["to swell"]. Etymology cannot prevent us from noticing these meanings. On the other hand, it is necessary to acknowledge the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context that has given the word its meaning', Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (based on the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann). Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

4 See Georges Teyssot's discussion of Benjamin's formulation of awakening as a threshold state. Teyssot writes: 'Awakening is thus not a caesura,

but the creation of a door, to be crossed by an extended series of rites, between the world of dreams and the waking state'. (90).

5 The narrator of *The Island* is also called Melina. See Penelope Stavrou's essay in this volume for a discussion of the shared names across Kefala's oeuvre.

6 I borrow this term from Heidi Hartwig's discussion of W. H. Auden's poetry. Hartwig argues that Auden moved from correlatives of landscape, the conventional *paysage moralisé*, to those of domestic interiors, *la maison moralisé*.

7 Topology can be related to topography but is distinct from it. Topology derives from mathematics and refers to spatial properties that are preserved under continuous deformations of objects. It may refer to the way 'constituent parts are interrelated or arranged' (topology, n. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/203426, accessed 28 June 2019). A topological map does not contain the detail of topography or its replication of scale but includes its essential elements. In the sense used here, it refers to the stripped lineaments and flows of the subjective interior.

Works Cited

Bachelard, Gaston. *Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas, New York, Beacon Press, 1994.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rold Tiedermann, translated by Howard Eiland, Boston, Harvard University Press, 1999 (1927–40).

Blumenberg, Hans. *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, translated by Robert Savage, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010 (1960).

Duclos, Vincent. 'Falling into things: Peter Sloterdijk, Ontological Anthropology in the Monstrous'. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture; Theory, Politics,* no. 95, 2019, pp. 37–53.

Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey*. Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *The Island*. Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1993 (1984).

—— *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children*. Sydney, John Ferguson, 1995.

—— 'Towards a Language', 1988. Reprinted in *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013.

—— *Summer Visit: Three Novellas*. Newcastle, Giramondo, 2002.

—— *Sydney Journals*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.

Hartwig, Heidi. 'La Maison Moralisé in W. H. Auden's "Thanksgiving for a Habitat"'. *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2012, pp. 9–19.

Lukács, George. *Theory of the Novel*. Boston, MIT Press, 1974 (1920).

Naipaul, V. S. *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account*. London, Blackwell, 2000.

—— 2001. 'Two Worlds'. Nobel Lecture. *Nobel Academy*, original retrieved 7 December 2014, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2001/naipaul-lecture-e.html.

Nickas, Helen. 'Re-deeming the Past: Personal and Cultural Memory in the Work of Antigone Kefala'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by V. Karalis and H. Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013.

Sloterdijk, Peter. 'Nearness and Da-sein: The Spatiality of Being and Time'. *Theory Culture and Society*, vol. 29, nos 4–5, 2012, pp. 36–42.

—— with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs. *Neither Sun Nor Death*, translated by Steve Corcoran, Boston, MIT Press, 2011.

Steiner, George. *Martin Heidegger: With a New Introduction*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989 (1978).

Stilgoe, John R. Foreword to Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas, New York, Beacon Press, 1994.

Teyssot, Georges. 'A Topology of Thresholds'. *Home Cultures*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, pp. 89–116.

Tsianikas, Michael. '*Alexia*: Antigone Kefala's Overdue Fairytale'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by V. Karalis and H. Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 171–87.

4

‘Re-defining yourself in some other terms’: Antigone Kefala’s Self-referential Weavings

Penelope Stavrou

‘So by day she’d weave at her great and growing web—
by night, by the light of torches set beside her,
she would unravel all she’d done. Three whole years
she deceived us blind, seduced us with this scheme …’ (Homer 21)

Within the Western literary imaginary, *The Odyssey*’s Penelope is considered a paragon of patience and unyielding loyalty. Her secret unravelling of the shroud is synonymous with marital fidelity, while her feminine, domestic spatiality signifies origin and end in contrast to masculine, mobile spatialities that are in constant transition. However, Penelope also represents the *defiance* of conventional femininity. More specifically, Penelope cunningly undermines the social norms limiting classical women’s agency

through the feminine act of textile weaving, which provides her with a way to manipulate time and delay remarriage. In *Eve of the Festival: Making Myth in Odyssey 19*, Olga Levaniouk reinforces this reading in a comparison of Penelope's weaving to a 'silent language' that helps her influence, and exercise choice in, the male world of public speaking (n.p.). Moreover, Penelope's narrative demonstrates the complexity of gendered subjectivity. Her incessant making and unmaking of the shroud reconstitutes the feminine, domestic space as a narratable place of creative production, revision and innovation, which contrasts to the male space that, despite its mobility, is restricted by civic duty. Penelope's subversion of Homeric gender boundaries also relates to her weaving of wiles *as well as* textiles. According to Levaniouk, while Homeric men and women are generally confined to the metaphorical and literal weaving of wiles and textiles respectively, Penelope's weaving represents *both* simultaneously. The comparison of Penelope to a 'flawless king' in *The Odyssey* (Homer 319) emphasises the ways in which her weaving of metaphorical wiles via her *un*weaving of literal textiles also maintains her position as a self-sufficient, female monarch who subverts expectations of leadership and gendered subjectivity.

The intricate and complex figure of Penelope has been examined by scholars as a figure who circulates in storytelling and in feminist theories of gendered literary construction. Penelope's weaving in particular has been theorised as a metaphor for self-reflexive literary and poetic construction, as in John Winkler's description of Penelope as 'a figure of the poet, quietly working behind the scene' (156). With reference to Winkler in her discussion of the relationship between time and self-reflexivity, Levaniouk contends that the 'plotting … reversal … repetition … variation [and] self-reflexiveness' of Penelope's work represents the 'manipulation of time and narrative typical of the … Odyssean poetic technique', and that her 'walking back and forth at [the] loom emerges as a key [to] its pervasive and multi-layered self-referentiality' (n.p.). Also in relation to textual

construction, Elizabeth McMahon argues that Penelope and Odysseus' relationship reflects the fidelity between author and subject within the narrative contract. In McMahon's view, the etymological links between weaving and the process of textual construction positions Odysseus as subject and Penelope as the faithful narrator. McMahon points out that Penelope's cunning tactics to delay the shroud's completion are 'synonymous with [Odysseus'] narrative continuance and the precedence of the metastructure over incidental opportunities' (145). McMahon also points out that Penelope's unweaving creates 'textual duration and charts the temporality of storytelling alongside the actual story of Odysseus' journey' (144–5). Accordingly, McMahon claims the author/subject duality as a 'necessary quality' of narrative construction (145).

The figure of Penelope provides an ideal framework from which to begin a study of Antigone Kefala relative to the interconnected and gendered issues of authorship, time and self-reflexivity. In particular, Penelope's craft-making, which is a daily domestic duty that is also driven by the circumstances of her life, is a fitting metaphor to analyse Kefala's textual practice, which records, but also *informs*, her experience. Accordingly, in this essay, I analyse Kefala's textual weavings as a Penelopean process that incorporates techniques of self-citation in the manner of iconic Modernist Gertrude Stein to claim that Kefala presents and (re)presents the artist's lived experience in a way that blurs the relationship between life and art, so that life *becomes* an artistic act. Additionally, I propose that the textual repetitions woven throughout the oeuvre signify Kefala's attempt to excavate the representation of her experience and interrogate its relationship to language. In this way, Kefala's repetitions echo Stein's employment of successive 'insistences' to augment or add to previous copies. Indeed, in the case of autobiography, these insistences fracture representations of identity and elongate the moment of arrival within a 'continuous present' (Stein qtd in Breslin, 912). Through this optic, an insistence denotes Kefala's

detangling of a knotted coil within the tapestry of her oeuvre, which corresponds with the excavation of a memory repressed by the psyche. This essay will identify and analyse a number of episodes within Kefala's oeuvre that exemplify the working and reworking of biographical material with the effect that her work becomes Penelopean, in the sense described by Karen Lawrence, where Penelope embodies: 'the spirit of narrative repetition, defending against the premature closure of the story' (8).

Kefala's Penelopean, Self-referential Web

Kefala has indicated that she considers experience to be inseparable from artistic practice. In her 2010 conversation with Amanda Simons, she discusses her development as a writer, noting that the first poem she wrote at a young age caused 'an immense inner excitement, as that of a craftsperson that [had] managed to solve the problem of the material'. She recounts her excitement in finding 'a method [in this moment] of solving what I wanted to express through language', which was an 'interconnection' she had not reached before. 'As a tradesperson', she notes, '[I] had managed to fix something' (Simons 60). Indeed, Kefala's metaphorical reference to writing as an artisanal craft recalls Penelope's weaving as craft. After her migrations to Greece and New Zealand in particular, Kefala discovered that new languages complicate one's encoded relationship to the 'material'. In her 1994 interview with Jenny Digby, she notes that 'When you change languages, you realise [it is] a construct … that has been created by a group of people with a certain historical base and … location [because] something you took to be immediately related to a concept is considered quite different' (34). In her 1988 essay 'Towards a Language', Kefala states that these changes reduced her life 'to the most simple elements', and that running between Romanian, Greek and English afflicted her with an 'inner dyslexia' ('Towards a Language, 26). She recalls diary writing as a means by which she could 'ground' herself and conduct an 'inner analysis' (Simons 68),

suggesting again that she writes like a 'tradesman' trying to 'fix' the 'problem of the material' through language. From the time of her migration to Australia in 1959, where she 'finally found a voice' and a sense of 'inner release', Kefala began to write in a more disciplined way to 'release … the things inside' ('Towards a Language' 27). Kefala also affirms using her diaries as a resource for her fiction due to 'their immediacy, and because you have them there – otherwise you would forget' (Simons 68).

In view of Kefala's own expositions, I suggest that what Kefala refers to as 'fixing' and 'grounding' the material of life relates to the reconceptualisation of experience with respect to the sign/referent relationship, through English as a language she found herself finally living in, albeit 'imperfectly' (Digby 33). Drawing from the insights of Sidonie Smith, Susan Friedman argues that autobiography, which splits the self into the narrat*ing* 'I' and narrat*ed* 'I', corresponds to the scene of Freudian analysis and positions the narrated self as 'I then' analysand, whose psyche is excavated and memories recovered by the narrating self as 'I now' analyst (83). In resonance with this Freudian 'writing cure' (Friedman 99), Kefala recalls using language to excavate and encode the 'things inside' that had been implicated by her 'inner dyslexia' as a means of self-creating a 'voice' in the present ('Towards a Language' 27). Kefala's account of conducting an 'inner analysis' (Simons 68) to move from her post-migration 'inner dyslexia' towards an 'inner release' ('Towards a Language' 26–7) echoes the process of moving from a paralysing nostalgia towards future potential via the excavation, acknowledgement and consolidation of memory and experience. This retroactive quality of Kefala's writing project is further reinforced by her assertion that she writes 'directly from immediate experience' (Digby 42) and a desire to 'express experiences elsewhere within the present … to allow the present some form and position, some possibilities and some kind of future' (Zournazi 56). Moreover, Kefala considers reflection an integral part of one's 'inner analysis', noting that individuals come 'with enormous baggage … that can

remain … static … if you are not working with [and] constantly evaluating between what was, what has become and what is current' (Zournazi 46). Indeed, Kefala's deployment of the travel metaphor 'baggage' illuminates her self-reflexive examination of the migrant experience in its reference to language as a space in which she, as a foreigner, migrates with prior knowledge that must be consolidated (Duwell n.p.).

The Penelopean model of metaphorical and literal craft uncovers Kefala's similarly complex, craft-like approach to language and writing. Firstly, while Kefala's narrative construction constitutes her literal weaving of craft, her metaphorical weaving of wiles is identified in the ways in which she conducts a textual self-creation *through* the narratives. Moreover, Kefala occupies both gender spatialities insofar as her writing as 'I now' recalls Penelope's homebound position, while her 'I then' subject possesses an Odyssean mobility. Helen Nickas' assertion that Kefala's oeuvre traces 'a continuous narrative which depicts and explores the various stages of an exilic journey' (qtd in Gauntlett 48) emphasises the mobility of her 'I then' subject. Therefore, in light of McMahon's reconceptualisation of these positions, Kefala emerges as both author and subject simultaneously. Kefala continues to weave wiles by blurring the author and subject roles for the purpose of interrogating the life/art, and language/referent, nexus. More specifically, the perpetual dissonance between Kefala's ethnicity and countries of residence suggests she is displaced from the concept of a 'native tongue', and instead explores language as a creative construct and an apparatus for writing as an art form. Indeed, Kefala openly states that she has no allegiance to any original language in particular, asserting that she does not write as 'something' or from a 'nationality', but rather, 'as an individual who has certain concerns and preoccupations' (qtd in Tsianikas 173–4). From this perspective, the ways in which language shapes perceptions of reality become *a part* of the artwork, which Kefala investigates through the representation of her lived experience as an artist.

Essentially, then, writing to self-create or, to use Kefala's terms, 'ground', 'fix' or 'solve' (Simons 60, 68) becomes the fictionalisation of experience. The oeuvre is, therefore, a web of connections, where the threads of art and life are woven together by Kefala, who uses language as the needle. The characters as 'I then' thus recall what Julia Kristeva terms the 'mask', which is a 'second, impassive personality … anesthetized skin [and] hiding place' that the 'I now' foreigner-as-analyst, who is both their product and producer, 'wraps himself in' (*Strangers* 6) to self-create in a way that also performs the post-structuralist 'I' shaped in, and by, language. To this end, while Kefala blurs dream and reality *within* the narratives, her input as both author and subject provokes a similar kind of curiosity *outside* the texts in relation to when the autobiography stops and the fiction begins.

Sneja Gunew argues that it is problematic to assume that migrant writing is always autobiographical (19). This is salutary advice, and the argument here does not seek to make such neat connections between the narratives and the author's life, which have already been sufficiently explored in the existing literature on Kefala's work. Rather, my claim that Kefala represents lived experience as an artistic act opens these connections to question, and approaches biography as a kind of fictional artwork. Kefala's melding of biography and fiction recalls the way in which Gertrude Stein constructs autobiography from an external perspective in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* to preserve her commitment to living and writing in a 'continuous present' with a perpetually elusive and, thus, creative identity (Breslin 902). More specifically, while Stein writes from the perspective of her life-partner, Toklas, to represent 'the inside as seen from the outside' (qtd in Breslin 905), Kefala wears the anaesthetised skin of her 'I then' characters to conduct a textual self-creation that doubles as fiction. Consequently, the connections between Kefala's life and narratives are not autobiographical transmissions but, rather, self-referential fields of self-citation that further align with Stein's theory of repetition as 'insistences' that construct

different emphases on each utterance. These accretions and qualifications of meaning work to augment the original meaning and illuminate the particularity of each instance (Stein 288). In relation to Kefala's citational practices, the re-casting of (often painful) lived experience into fiction first identifies its creative potential, which she textually excavates – 'fixes' or 'solves' – via self-citation in subsequent works, a process that contributes to her wider intertextual project of self-creation across the oeuvre.

Kefala's textual self-creation as a foreign and inconclusive 'subject-in-process' (Kristeva, *Desire* 125) is another Penelopean quality embedded within her writing. In particular, the recurring self-citations destabilise the temporality of the oeuvre's intertextual 'narrative' depicting an 'exilic journey'. Therefore, Kefala's account of this journey does not progress in a linear fashion but, rather, it moves back and forth in a way that recalls Penelope's unravelling and reweaving. In this way, Kefala constructs a textual self-creation that simultaneously hints at its perpetual incompletion, which echoes Penelope's preserved fidelity to 'narrative continuance' (McMahon 144), as well as Stein's commitment to 'a continuous present' (Breslin 902). Indeed, this process of unpicking and reweaving can, at first glance, appear contradictory to the metaphor of excavation that I draw from psychoanalytic discourse to examine Kefala's representation of experience. Conversely, I propose that they are, in fact, complementary when we consider the ways in which Penelope's weaving, which is driven by the circumstances of her life, recalls self-reflexive textual construction and, further to this, the Freudian 'writing cure'. With this in mind, the initial retrieval of disorganised memories, which are often clouded by facets that are repressed, reflects the weaving of a textual tapestry that is dotted with knots. The detangling of these knots, and subsequent reweaving of the tapestry, thus corresponds with the process of revisiting and excavating the repressed memories clouding accurate retrieval. However, the nature of Kefala's unpicking and reweaving is unique in its commitment to continuity through the playful, trickster-like

interrogation of the ways in which the 'accurate' is recorded as art with respect to the relationship between interiority (memory) and exterior structures (language). Just as Penelope manipulates time by unravelling her shroud, Kefala, too, evades finality and the limits of language by unweaving and reweaving the self-reflexive web of her oeuvre, which evokes a textual mise en abyme, where copies of the same image are layered on top of one another in a recurring sequence that captures author and reader within what Friedman calls 'a chain of devouring repetitions' (98). This intertextual layering reconstitutes the 'end', which is where the 'accurate' is located, into a spatiality that opens up to another origin and, thus, arrival. Kefala attests to this assessment, noting that she is 'constantly trying to recapture the living [and] elusive element at the beginning of the experience, [which] has to be re-created constantly by discovered means that will bring it out' (*Sydney Journals* 71). Kefala has also noted that this process of 'rebalancing [your] inner and outer forces', learning how to 'redefine yourself in other terms' and 'solving the issues inside' is perpetually unfinished and sees you start from 'a zero position' because you 'always have something new to say', which leads to a 'repetitiousness' (Zournazi 57; Simons 67).

'The Boarding House', 'Intimacy', *Sydney Journals*

'The Boarding House' (1975), one of the two stories that comprise Kefala's first published prose work *The First Journey*, and 'Intimacy' (2002), published as part of her fourth collection of prose work in *Summer Visit*, share similarities in setting, characterisation, motifs and themes. In particular, both are set in Sydney and chart the failing marriages of protagonists Melina and Helen, respectively. There are, however, significant variations across these two storylines. 'The Boarding House', for instance, has been described as a 'coming to the city' (Stender 76) narrative that traces Melina's experience of relocating to Sydney after having separated from her husband Richard. Helen is similarly unfulfilled by her marriage to

Philip but has not separated from him. Nevertheless, the phonetic similarity between the protagonists' names, as well as their almost identical experiences, suggests that they can be read as the same character in different stages of their lives and that is Helen is, in meaningful ways, a re-written, over-written version of Melina. This indicates that, after twenty-seven years, Kefala is reversing narrative time to self-cite and rewrite certain key events and sensations represented in 'The Boarding House'. 'Intimacy' thus develops the 'continuous narrative [depicting] the … stages of an exilic journey' (Nickas qtd in Gauntlett 48) retroactively by undoing and redoing fragments of those stages. This temporal, textual fold accounts for Helen's mature characterisation, despite 'Intimacy' heralding a return to the stage before Melina's departure. In other words, if 'The Boarding House' captures a young heroine fleeing 'a previous life and love' (Stender 76), 'Intimacy' thus returns to, and labours through, these experiences from a mature and perhaps more self-aware perspective.

There are direct connections between 'The Boarding House', 'Intimacy' and events of Kefala's life. 'The Boarding House', in particular, invites comparison to Kefala's own 'coming to the city' experience of migrating to Sydney. Moreover, the relationship Melina leaves behind recalls the 'unsolvable events' that Kefala briefly notes prompted her migration to Australia in her biographical piece 'Towards a Language' (27). Indeed, these events could relate to a divorce that Kefala rarely discusses in interviews about her life. Indeed, whilst such connections are not unusual in literature, it is Kefala's blurring of time, as well as the incessant repetition, variation and centrality of the failed marriage itself, that make her self-citation here particularly unique as a reworking of trauma. To use her own travel metaphor, it can be argued that Kefala weaves her unpacking of this particular 'baggage' of 'unsolvable events' (Zournazi 46; Kefala, 'Towards a Language' 27) through the narrative, which is fragmented by Melina's memories of marriage. Kefala reopens and detangles the 'baggage' in 'Intimacy', which unweaves the narrative to the

point *before* Melina's departure, so that it can be re-examined in the present through Helen's narrative.

Two scenes that capture Melina and Helen at house parties reflect the same event and sensation of immobilisation, which suggests they represent self-citational coordinates of intertextual convergence that map one of Kefala's excavation sites. Here, Richard and Philip leave Melina and Helen alone in rooms they respectively describe as 'large and uncomfortable' ('The Boarding House' 104) and 'large and cavernous' ('Intimacy' 10). Both Melina and Helen become physically trapped in the middle of a group of people and, upon their escape, seek solace in the spaces that flank the party halls. Moreover, the 'tall and blonde and foreign' (104) host in 'The Boarding House' reappears in 'Intimacy' as the 'tall blonde woman' who Helen observes 'speaking to the waiters in familiar tones, directing them' (11). Both Melina and Helen are also asked whether they are alone, to which they reply that they are with their husbands ('The Boarding House' 105; 'Intimacy' 11). From a Penelopean perspective, then, the relationship between these two scenes can be viewed as one of an overlay, in which 'The Boarding House' is superimposed over 'Intimacy', as in a palimpsest or montage.

Kefala's representation of this event in 'The Boarding House' blurs past and present, which implies it is a repressed memory that re-emerges and fragments Melina's engagement with the present. More specifically, the scene is a memory that abruptly halts the linear sequence of the narrative with the line '"The bearded young man", I said' (103), which is clarified later as Melina's response to being asked whether she is alone. The repetition of this line, which occurs after Melina escapes the crowd, produces the effect of time freezing and attests to her description of the ordeal lasting 'for what seemed an endless time' (104). There is also no clear indication that this is a memory until the tense jumps back to the present after Melina's escape, with no warning other than an ellipsis. Moreover, the immobilising sensation is illustrated using surreal metaphors that have a tangible effect on

Melina, which provokes speculation as to whether the memory is accurate or tarnished by trauma. In particular, Melina stands anxiously 'alone in the middle of the room' feeling 'as if they were pinning me there within a magic ring out of which I could not move', which she likens to an 'invisible net they were all tracing … all in unison [and] in a compact well regimented way' that became 'so powerful … that my feet would not move and I stood rooted to the floor' (104). Melina has to wait for the crowd's 'collective will' to break before making her escape over 'the line … to the other end' of the room, where she is 'exhausted' (104). Later in the text, Melina's stay at the boarding house is described as an immobilising experience that mimics her time at the party, and, thus, further blurs present/past and dream/reality in the text. More specifically, Melina is 'weighed down by an unknown force' (95) in the limbo-like space of 'The Boarding House', which she likens to 'a dark and musty tomb' with 'marble floors and peeling ceilings' (97). Melina observes the city, too, as a surreal, stony edifice in which 'Gigantic mechanical flowers burn … against the vibrating depth of the sky' (107) and townspeople roam with faces of 'carved bones … made of some ancient primitive stone' (96). Evidence of the parallel to Kefala's life is Melina's hesitation to leave 'The Boarding House' because she feels 'too exposed' (95) outside, which echoes Kefala's own assertion that there's an exposure in one's writing, and that 'you become less exposed' as 'you are solving the issues inside, finding some sort of voice and so on' (Zournazi 57).

Kefala's citation of this event in the opening passage of 'Intimacy' is a superimposition that disentangles it from the past and redefines it within the present, as signalled by the text's arguably 'less exposed', third-person narration. The event is almost identically re-presented here through the depiction of Helen as 'suddenly alone, trapped in the middle of the crowd pressing on her from all sides' (9). The scene deviates from 'The Boarding House', however, in its more concise representation of the sensation itself, which sees a more composed Helen 'trying

to get out' and swiftly making it 'towards the edges' before escaping to the powder room, wherein the mirror's reflection of an 'unknown staring at her' (9) signifies the character's doubleness. The narration specifies that Helen's desire to 'escape' the room (11) stems from her distaste for 'meaningless gatherings … with people she had nothing in common with' (10), which is an explanatory detail that is missed in Melina's fragmented memory of this event ('The Boarding House' 103–6). Moreover, Helen metaphorically refers to the partygoers as 'figures in a shadow play' producing 'the same shadow' ('Intimacy' 13) and wearing 'masks made by unknown hands' (10) to denote their existence 'without identities, serving necessities that did not seem to be their own' (16). Whilst this image of puppetry corresponds with the stony townspeople in 'The Boarding House', it functions more clearly here as a metaphor for the partygoers' lack of subjectivity and agency. As such, Kefala's repetition of metaphor in this scene is a Steinian insistence that detangles Melina's narration in 'The Boarding House', which, conversely, fails to indicate whether the 'stoniness' of the world is a figure of speech or the product of hallucination (96). Indeed, Helen's description of Philip's voice as made of 'some hard, plastic material' ('Intimacy' 31) is another insistence that further clarifies Melina's machinic, semiotic imagery to describe the city ('The Boarding House 107), which invokes a surreal, dreamy landscape in conjunction with the stony townsfolk (96). Helen's accounts, thus, redefine the sensations depicted in 'The Boarding House' in order to 'solve' the gaps in Melina's repressed memory.

The house party is repeated in an entry of Kefala's 2008 published journal *Sydney Journals*, in which the fiction and fact collapse into a patchwork of genres and textual connections. More specifically, whereas the superimposition of the party scene in 'The Boarding House' onto that in 'Intimacy' is an overlay of fiction on fiction, in *Sydney Journals* it is an overlay of fiction on top of factual documentation, which simultaneously complicates and confirms the connections between the two modes given the

latter classification as a journal. For example, in *Sydney Journals*, Kefala attends a party at a 'decrepit' house with 'peeling' walls that is likened to a 'burial ground'. The blonde woman reappears as a figure named P., as well as the vacuous 'lost soul' attendees boasting 'unknown faces' and drinking out of plastic cups (87–8). The fact that Kefala mentions writing 'Intimacy' in an earlier entry (17) invites speculation about whether the entry's account of the party is the initial citation that is 'redefined' in 'Intimacy', or whether Kefala is citing and redefining the house-party scene from 'Intimacy' in this entry. These characters and sensations reappear throughout the journals. In later entries, Kefala meets some executives and journalists that she describes as 'electronically operated', 'lost souls in a metallic pit' (79), with one donning a 'rock-made head' and 'sterilising' the conversation with 'chloroform' (81). Additionally, Kefala describes 'our gestures' as 'ancient' and 'inscribed on marble or stone century after century' (80), which, on one hand, suggests that the texts cite and fictionalise this experience, while on the other, that Kefala is citing and fictionalising the texts in *this* entry. The lens from which we view the intertextual exilic journey mapped across Kefala's oeuvre via the insights provided in the *Journals* is kaleidoscopic, and further fractures our understanding of the relationship between author and text. The *Journals* thus reflect Stein's autobiographical construction, which boasts an 'elusive center and discontinuous design' (Breslin 904), and point to 'the disparity between actuality and its representation' to function as both 'historical memoir [and] fictional construct' (911).

Points of convergence between 'The Boarding House', 'Intimacy' and the *Journals* that coordinate an intertextual mise en abyme emerge within the passages that capture an altercation between the protagonists and their husbands. The scenes in 'The Boarding House' and 'Intimacy', in particular, depict Melina and Helen destabilising the power dynamics of their marriages via language and utterance, which are represented as the tools that map spatial reality. Just as Kefala examines the art/life nexus

through the texts, so too do the characters *within* the narratives here, which demonstrates the thematic layering of a textual mise en abyme. In 'The Boarding House', Melina is aware of the extent to which life imitates art, which is made evident early in the text when she identifies the 'dignified, well-shaped movement(s)' of a priest enacting a 'well-played role' stemming from 'years of practice and experience of public performance' (91). In a scene that contributes retroactively to the linear narrative, Melina recalls her altercation with Richard as, likewise, simulating a performance. In particular, she describes the exchange, which occurred over dinner, as an 'inexorable game' (100), and her role within it as 'dangerous' after her elusive 'attack' threatened to 'split his protective husk open' (99). The nature of the attack is unspecified, but the way in which Melina disarms herself by lowering her voice to a 'normal level' and 'returning again … to safe points' about 'everyday things' (100) suggests it was a hostile utterance that deviated from her usual wifely performance. Prior to Melina's disarmament, Richard was 'sucked by a narrow fear to a small point', which translates physically through his shrunken posture, whereas afterwards, he 'enlarge[d] in the space [Melina] offered, building himself with amazing rapidity' (99–100). This indicates that Richard has rebuilt the Symbolic realm, which Melina refers to as his 'reality' (100), that coordinates the power dynamic of their relationship and his subjectivity within that structure. The altercation is also presented as a recent and frequent occurrence between the two, such that it can, therefore, be considered an intimation of what prompted the confrontation between Helen and Philip in 'Intimacy'. This passage reveals that Philip's sexual desire for Helen, which is described as a 'momentary loss of consciousness' ('Intimacy' 34) that overwhelms him as if 'taken by a narcotic' (33), first instigated the power struggle. Art/life are blurred through the metaphorical description of sex as a 'short-lived high drama' that Philip coordinates and plays through Helen, who is the passive 'living thing' upon which the drama unfolds (34). Indeed, this 'drama' echoes the effects

of Richard's 'reality' in 'The Boarding House' (100). Helen, like Melina, appeals to redefine her role via utterance by instigating a conversation with Philip about their intimacy, which he, however, 'immediately cut[s] … off' ('Intimacy' 34). Helen's introspection, which is more cognisant than Melina's, explains that Philip believes this discussion would coordinate 'an end that should [be] kept permanently in front of one, lest the actual challenge it presented should show how inadequate one was to its measure' (34–5). Interestingly, just as Melina disarms herself by returning to safe speaking points about the 'everyday' ('The Boarding House' 100), Philip *re*-arms himself here by reverting 'immediately to the everyday', which allays the disruptive conversation and helps him 're-establish himself' ('Intimacy' 34) within his codified life-drama. Philip then watches Helen 'as if she had become a dangerous toy' (35), which echoes the way in which Richard observes Melina to assess whether she remains dangerous ('The Boarding House' 99). Helen is, therefore, 'denied the space in which her responses could develop' and concludes that the 'space had been mapped before, mostly by male voices' ('Intimacy' 34). Indeed, this recalls Richard's rebuilt space made of his 'values' that 'trapped anyone that fell outside it' ('The Boarding House' 100).

Kefala cites the events and sensations related to the altercation scenes in an entry of the *Journals*, which documents her memory of a figure referred to as 'U.'. Kefala implies that this moment heralded their imminent separation, which suggests it picks up where 'Intimacy' ends and 'The Boarding House' begins. Here, Kefala metaphorically parallels the memory of driving to visit a friend with 'driving fast' towards a feeling that they will 'never be together again' (*Sydney Journals* 140), which evokes Philip's anxiety about reaching 'an end that should [be] kept permanently in front of one' ('Intimacy' 34–5). Moreover, Kefala is depicted 'both inside and outside the car', which reflects the sensation that Melina describes as 'when I am inside I want to go out. / When I go out I want to close doors behind me' ('The

Boarding House' 99). Kefala excavates this sensation through her accompanying description of feeling 'as if … on the other side of the road, speeding in the opposite direction, disconnected from my own body, and watching … from outside, floating' (*Sydney Journals* 140), which extends the altercation scenes in both stories in its representation of spatial *re*mobilisation via elevation. However, this also injects a surreal, dreamlike quality to the entry in its portrayal of two, oppositional Antigones – the real in the car and the imagined floating above – which visually depicts the contrast between matter and symbol, and, thus, the art/life nexus. Moreover, this scene also visually illustrates Stein's autobiographical account of the 'inside as seen from the outside', which sees her 'stepping out of the frame, as if she were alive, truly existing' (Breslin 905). Therefore, while Kefala weaves the narrative threads of 'The Boarding House' and 'Intimacy' together within this entry, she also simultaneously *unweaves* them here via her representation of the surreal, which provokes speculation as to whether it is an accurate portrayal of the real experience that elucidates all previous repeated insistences, or another frame within the 'devouring repetitions' (Friedman 98) of the textual mise en abyme.

Three dream sequences across 'The Boarding House', 'Intimacy' and the *Journals* coordinate further sites of intertextual convergence and excavation. In 'Intimacy', Helen dreams of a house that is surrounded by a 'deserted lawn' and positioned 'on top of a cliff and a massive lead grey sea' (30), which can be considered a citation of the 1975 text's boarding house that is similarly situated above an ocean and surrounded by 'spacious lawns' ('The Boarding House' 87). Melina feels 'sure [she] had been [to the boarding house], in previous dreams' (88), which suggests that she is, in fact, referring to Helen's dream. A similar dream sequence re-emerges in the *Journals*, where Kefala is in 'a room full of dust and broken objects' that is 'above the open sea' and later walks 'along the corridor and … into a room equally dusty, full of broken marble bodies, their limbs strewn everywhere' (82).

Here, Kefala is citing the spatially decrepit boarding house and recycling the marble motif used to represent the townsfolk in 'The Boarding House' to illustrate their now-broken bodies. In other words, the entry intersects with 'Intimacy' and 'The Boarding House' by excavating Helen's dream, which in turn elucidates Melina's similar, but more surreal experience. The fact that these connections are woven together within a dream, however, further complicates their relationship and paints this self-citation as one that further blurs the dream/reality and art/life nexus.

Through her textual weavings, Kefala incessantly and repetitively documents and *re*-documents key events and sensations in the artist's life through her literary project, which connects and *dis*connects the language/referent nexus, so that life and reality – as well as past and present – are blurred. In this way, her writing style complicates the idea of autobiographical migrant writing. More significantly, the ambiguity it creates allows her to record subjectivity and experience textually in a way that also preserves their connections to the 'continuous present' within the real. To this end, a reference made in the *Journals* struck me as a fitting conclusion for this essay in its showcasing of the crisp, yet cunning and ambiguous tone Kefala employs to weave her textual tapestry and Penelopean narrative contract, positioning the readers as suitors who anticipate finality, but are denied it. In the end, the only certainty left to us when approaching Kefala's work seems to be that 'we cannot go behind art. The illusion that we can is, of course, art's most compelling hallucination' (*Sydney Journals* 43).

Works cited

Breslin, James E. 'Gertrude Stein and the Problems of Autobiography'. *The Georgia Review*, vol. 33, no. 4, winter 1979, pp. 901–13.

Digby, Jenny. 'Antigone Kefala: A Labyrinthian Linguistic Field.' *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 31–44.

Duwell, Martin. 'Inward Illumination: On Antigone Kefala'. *Sydney Review of Books*, 10 June 2014, https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/antigone-kefala/, accessed 7 January 2019.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D's Fiction*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Gauntlett, Stathis. 'Exilic Colour'. *Australian Book Review*, August 2003, pp. 48–9, http://hdl.handle.net/2328/1175, accessed 10 February 2019.

Gunew, Sneja. 'Migrant Women Writers: Who's on Whose Margins?' *Meanjin*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1983, pp. 16–26.

Homer. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fagles, London, Penguin Classics, 2006. http://www.boyle.kyschools.us/UserFiles/88/The%20Odyssey.pdf, accessed 15 January 2019.

Kefala, Antigone. Contemporary Poets, 2001, https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/kefala-antigone-0, accessed 13 March 2019.

Kefala, Antigone. 'The Boarding House'. *The First Journey: Two Short Novels*, Glebe, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— 'Intimacy'. *Summer Visit: Three Novellas*, Newcastle, Giramondo, 2002, pp. 9–42.

—— *Sydney Journals: Reflections 1970–2000*, Artarmon, NSW, Giramondo, 2008.

—— 'Towards a Language'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 22–9.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

Lawrence, Karen. *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994.

Levaniouk, Olga. *Eve of the Festival: Making Myth in Odyssey 19*, Washington, DC, Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011, https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3764.15-back-to-the-loom, accessed on 10 February 2019.

McMahon, Elizabeth. *Islands, Identity and the Literary Imagination*, London, Anthem Press, 2016.

Simons, Amanda. 'Antigone Kefala on Writing'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 59–70.

Stein, Gertrude. 'Portraits and Repetition'. *Stein*, Penguin, 2001, pp. 287–312.

Stender, Neal. 'On *The First Journey* (Wild & Wooley, 1975)'. *San Francisco Review of Books,* March 1977. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey,* edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 76–8.

Tsianikas, Michael. '*Alexia*: Antigone Kefala's Overdue Fairytale'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 171–87.

Winkler, John. *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, New York, Routledge, 1990.

Zournazi, Mary. 'Antigone Kefala: By the Roadside'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 45–58.

5

Decentred Heterologies in the Poetic Journeys of Antigone Kefala

Vrasidas Karalis

1. Towards a language

The publication of two new poetry collections, *Fragments* in 2016 and *Journeys* in 2019, invites a closer reading of Antigone Kefala's poems in order to explore and investigate the development of her work over the last fifty years. Both collections seem to bring her poetic trajectory to its ultimate structural and expressive limits by presenting the most accomplished distillation of her poetic idiom.

Despite their phenomenal simplicity, Kefala's poems are verbal spaces of perplexing density that show a poet in a constant and somehow *agonistic* dialogue with many writers of her generation as well as with her predecessors, the grand founders of Modernism. Furthermore, over the years her work becomes more laconic and epigrammatic; it also becomes more self-reflexive and self-referential, as the poet ponders on her own

poetic development and explores the outermost limits of her poetic territory. The concluding verses from *Journeys* indicate that a sense of an ending, of terminal positionality, has been achieved and the poet bespeaks it in the most sparse and unequivocal manner. 'But as night fell', she writes, 'silence, and / this subtle loneliness / that comes with / the delicate colours / of the sky / like a force that is / forever vanishing' (n.p.). The idea of a vanishing horizon becomes increasingly an indication of a poet who confronts the limits of expression and sees beyond the horizon of meaning.

However, in our era, in which poetry has taken a new turn towards conceptual or post-internet poetry, we have a serious problem of how to deal with the hermeticism, taciturnity and inwardness of her work, as of any work of the past. One of the most understudied poets and critics of Australian letters, Noel Rowe, provides one way we might attempt this in his seminal critical statement: 'it helps to read poetry as if it were giving variations on important images, rather than as evidence for central ideas of themes. This approach invites the reader to play a game of associations' (v). If we follow Rowe's way of 'reading sideways' we can easily detect the complex subtexts that are converging on and emerge out of the bare, subtle and monosyllabic verses framing the inwardness of Kefala's poetic world.

There is an analogous transmutation within her prose, which appears equally crisp and transparent, and, on many occasions, reveals in retrospect the hidden tension, indeed the dark subtexts of her work. In her prose, Kefala talks indirectly about the traumatic feeling of exile and loss that is implied always in her work, although it is avoided in her poems so that her poetry could never be called confessional. Her prose deals with what she calls 'the madness of reality' ('The Boarding House' 121), which means the absolute unpredictability and chaos of personal and collective history, the explicit theme of her first published prose work, *The First Journey* (1975). How to come to terms with the anxiety of unknowable and ever-expanding space is probably the

central structural principle of her prose works; it can be also seen as the latent background for her poems.

Drawing again from Rowe's suggested approach to poetic reading, we will try to unveil some of the complex realities and sometimes confusing discourses in her verses that may *place* and *displace* their readers simultaneously. As I have argued elsewhere, Kefala is the master of poetic ellipsis – which also means a master of existential evasion. As claimed, 'ellipsis [...] is based on the intentional omission of any verbal element that could refract or obscure the intensity of the experience implied by her words' ('The Poetics of Ellipsis' 255). However, the ellipsis is not simply a rhetorical trope or a formal device: more than anything else it is an existential *topos* that the poem itself maps out through indirect semiosis the necessary leads by which readers can navigate their way through it. Her work *places* us within a strange topography of being, and at the same time *displaces* us from it. The dialectic of absence and presence, of inclusion and exclusion, that we encounter in her poems is probably the most characteristic aspect of her whole work, as indicated by the title of the 1992 collection of her poetry, *Absence*.

Absence, however, is not a static state of nothing and non-existence; through its Latin etymology *ab-sens*, non-perception or non-sensory experience, it implies a multiplicity of states of being: non-appearance, non-existence, and even non-attention in a way that Simone Weil would have understood as 'attention alone – that attention which is so full that the "I" disappears' (Weil 179). The poet extinguishes her 'I' within the elliptical semiotic circle defined by the phenomenology of the everyday experience; it is diffused over a network of signs, associations and synecdoches that multiply its semantic references despite its expressive minimalism. The cumulative sign of 'absence' indicates a variety of modes of perception that link the elliptical articulation in her work with the existential quest for presence and completeness *outside the text*. That there is meaning outside the text seems to be the dominant idea throughout her writings: the poem is a condensation of the semantic forces that made

it possible. Such semantic framing is more obvious in Greek as *apousia* and *parousia* (absence and presence), which are both connected to the perception of essence, *ousia*. This semantic dialectical unity is crucial for the understudying of the various subtexts that enrich the structural simplicity of Kefala's verses.

Understanding the connection of both presence and absence to essence disrupts a view of her poetry as the framing of the space of semantic nihilism and existential nostalgia. Absence is not silence or indeed meaninglessness, as in the silence of god that so much bedevilled the existentialist thinking of Albert Camus and the post-Holocaust poetry of Paul Celan, for example. On the contrary, it indicates a firm vision of what is not present, and does not affect the senses as immediacy, yet its absence defines traces and impressions that indicate its removal, its *deprivation*; something has been taken away and the poem articulates its imaginative reconstruction. Each poem is an addition that completes the existential picture and integrates a view of being that the immediate senses deny or obscure. *Her poems circumscribe a field of meanings instead of describing an objective situation*.

Kefala's poetry is precisely about the loss of completeness and the yearning of a restitution that would complete and re-create existential plenitude in moments of fulfilment. Her prose fairytale *Max: The Confessions of a Cat* (2009) is a deceptively simple fable about the ultimate quest: 'one must accept one's limitations, in spite of this DESIRE FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE' (68). Under the disguise of Aesopian fable, the fundamental desire of her quest for form becomes pronounced. Indeed, one could claim that the most important yearning that we find in Kefala is to construct a form adequate to encapsulate in English the experiential energy of a poet who relocates herself in both linguistic and existential terms.

Marina Tsvetaeva captures the duality of such effort in her essay 'Poets with History and Poets without History', where she writes: 'The poet's self is a dream-self and a language-self; it is the "I" of a dreamer awakened by inspired speech and realised only in that speech' (136). In Kefala, the 'desire for the impossible'

can be found in that confluence between the dream-self and the language-self of the poet in her attempt to infuse the dominant forms of the Australian tradition, constructed around the canonical works of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden and Dylan Thomas, with the surplus being of another linguistic potentiality, originating in her own linguistic history and identification.

However, beyond the individual level of her origins, such dialectics can be seen as her response to a perpetual crisis that poetic language confronts constantly in our time – indeed the crisis of poetry had started after World War II. It is a crisis of shared semantics and symbols, as well as a crisis about collective heritage and individual memory. From the first collection, *The Alien* (1973), to the latest, *Journeys* (2019), the poet exists in a constant liminality, as Anna Couani observes: 'her writing voice is not so much borne out of the migrant experience, as is often claimed about her, but one that has emerged in a liminal space' (Couani 1). In 'Sacred Objects' (*Fragments* 47), Kefala localises her liminality: 'They watch us from inside / in silence / anxious too / trying to sustain / their brittle images / worn thin by our hands / constantly greedy / for some tangible proof'. The juxtaposition of inside and outside is an attempt to bring the *ruptural dialectics* of being into a momentary form of equilibrium offered only by the linguistic articulation within the poem. '[The greed] for some tangible proof' becomes the ultimate desire for the redeeming presence, which is constantly postponed and deferred within the context of a world she still explores.

Ultimately, Kefala's poems articulate what the phenomenon of writing poetry reveals about the human experience in the era of 'erasure' and 'deconstruction' in the transient space between cultures, traditions and languages in which all things and ideas morph into new conceptual and imaginative entities through their mutual osmosis. Like many other writers in the same space – Vladimir Nabokov for example, or Joseph Brodsky – she belongs to that specific group that could be called *translingual*, who move between languages and idioms. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein's

famous pronouncement that 'the limits of my language mean [or define] the limits of my world' (5, 6, 70), we can claim that the journeys through languages are also journeys through worlds and their existential complexities. In one of her most interesting texts of self-reflexion, titled indicatively 'Towards a Language', Kefala delineates the various biographical specifics that forced her to move from one language to another: from Romanian to French, and then to Greek and finally to Antipodean English. Such transition established an atmosphere of transience and disbelief in her work: the statement that culminates her mobility is found in her very first published verse, 'Holidays in the Country' from *The Alien*: 'In dreams begins the journey, they would say / moving the candle in the darkened room / that smelt of cherry jam and basil' (*Absence* 13). A journey is both a mental and a pragmatic relocation; it is a form of translation of existential realities experienced in different words but re-formulated in order to fit into a new order of experiential forms.

Such feelings of dreamlike, oneiric experiences of translation or transposition are products of a profound questioning of self-validation and self-fulfilment. They manifest the unique mood of *derealisation* in the sense that Sigmund Freud gave to the term and which we encounter throughout her whole work. When Freud visited the Acropolis, he wrote that he had a '*momentary feeling of derealisation*', which he expressed as '*What I see here is not real*' (emphasis mine). As Freud himself remarked, this was not simply a matter of repression, anxiety or falsification. More than all of these, it expressed a sense of completeness: 'It seemed to me beyond the realms of possibility that I should travel so far – that I should go such a long way' (244). In Kefala's work, too, derealisation indicates prior fulfilment, unity, completeness: her absence foregrounds the amazement and the awe for her own self-realisation, the overcoming of fear and alienation, and at the same time her own disbelief that this is actually happening.

Moreover, one could claim that such derealised experience emerged within the social, and specifically Australian, context

of her writing, which embodies the *placing* function of her work. In its very 'absence', the social space of Australian realities looms large over and within her work. It is absent only because Kefala does not dominate it: she entered it as an 'alien' and her poetic language is an exploration of the potentialities found in the encounters with other aliens. Her poetry frames the linguistic and existential adventure of encountering different ways of being through a palimpsest of linguistic experiences. Language itself is the ultimate ontological grounding through which the poetic voice constructs its place: the elusive journey of the past which dominates the realities of personal and collective history is translated into the language of a solid abode. The poet enters language, and especially Australian English, at a specific historical intersection when Australian poetry was reorientating itself and was exploring its position within the wider cosmopolitan networks of poetic articulation.

We must, therefore, situate Kefala's poetry within the network of discourses that were practised when she appeared in Australian literary culture. One of the central preoccupations in Australian poetry, especially after 1945, was, according to Judith Wright, to overcome what she called 'the lingering dependence and uncertainty … of the literature of exile' (xviii), in the sense that everything written in Australia not associated with Aboriginal experience is, in reality, a literature of exile. For Wright, overcoming such dependence does not mean rejecting the literature of nostalgia, but offers 'the opportunity … to make our loss into a gain, to turn Australia into a reality, to become something new in the world' (xiv). In this impetus and ambition, the poetry of the postwar poets connects with some of the most persistent concerns of Australian literature since the Jindyworobaks. The transition from the poetry of exile to the consolidation of a specific poetic dwelling was the achievement of the great poets of the postwar period in Australia and especially Kenneth Slessor. As Rowe writes, Slessor's poetry has 'a fascination with buried states and its eloquent doubting of words'

which 'derives in part from an imaginative structure which has been working deeply within mainstream Australian culture' (11).

However, instead of trying to see how and where Kefala's poetry fits in or is linked to such an 'imaginative structure' of Australian poetry, new divisions were invented through the deceptive allure of hyphenated identifications. Such classifications approach the work of art as un-dialogic, insular and isolated, relegating it to a corner of literary history without wider or collective significance. On the other hand, the allure of the margins as a rebellion against the conventionalism of mainstream writing further complicates the need of the poets to exist within the active conversations and debates of their time – and the interpretations of critics about their work. When the hyphen appears, it is indicated that there is something missing, not added, from the semantics of the poem. It *minoritises* the work itself by limiting its denotations and indicating that it is from *elsewhere* – that it remains an alien presence outside the daily dialogue of symbols and tropes that define the sematic and imaginative territory of a specific tradition.

Kefala's poetry has been covered by such ideas for many decades, and only recently have we been able to study her poetry as poetry. Her overall work – prose, memoirs, fairytales – has also been studied (to the extent that it has been studied), only to point out her migrant status, as if all her work could be reduced to the biographical particulars of her life. This approach not only diminishes the historical significance of her work, at the particular moment it appeared, but more importantly it restricts the hermeneutical approaches to her development as a poet.

In our approach, the cardinal element around which we can structure a hermeneutical framework is not reduced to history and the societal structures that defined the life and the reception of her work. In literary criticism, it has almost remained a permanent fixation to indicate that Kefala the poet is an 'alien' (which means an intruder or indeed an unexpected guest) to Australia and its literature. With very few exceptions, the historiography

of Australian literature still struggles to find a position for works like hers, without hyphenating their identity and without placing them on the periphery of the writing enterprise in Australia.

Even in the most recent works she is mentioned only in passing, without further discussion of what her work represents historically for the Australian canon. Furthermore, even in the most ambitious work of synthesis about Australian poetry as attempted by Paul Kane, her work was not noticed even though its very structure abides in 'the blank space between the words [which] represents a displacement, an *aporia* that is crucial to Australian poetry as a whole' (Kane 3). If there is a space in which her poetry could be found, this can only be a space in which existential *aporia* points to a profound displacement of imagination in its attempt to find its own place in the country. Whenever it happens, the work is treated as a historical document and not a poetic testimony. Such approach makes her poetry, like the work of many other idiosyncratic poets, into an exception and sometimes an oddity to the accepted canon of a tradition. Instead of proposing a new conceptual paradigm of overlapping circles in the creative activity of a society, the scheme of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic literatures simply imposes a Manichean perception of a perpetual conflict and of power dynamics in literary cultures based on the division of what is organically or authentically Australian and what has come from outside and is not indigenous to its environment.

On the other hand, the truth is that the heroic period of the lonely migrant poet fighting against the dominant poets of a country who controlled fame, grants and literary representations is probably gone. Yet instead of reconceptualising the historical specificities of literary representations, new separatist cultural movements have emerged that have fragmented any idea of a cohesive and comprehensive cultural imaginary. It is imperative that we construct a new cultural paradigm incorporating and integrating all literary activities into a cohesive hermeneutical paradigm that would account for the variations and the varieties

of literary idioms. Even the margins have their centres, and the centres have their own micro-centres. Literary writing is itself an act of counter-hegemonic activity. Cultural historians and literary critics have to locate the specificity of each work and give a habitation and a name to the work in front of them. As one of Kefala's mentors, Ian Mudie, wrote: 'To me the poem / should be / as spare and bare / as the pruned tree. / Let the reader / dress in flesh / of perception / dry bones of words' (Elliott 90).

In order to achieve this, Kefala had to invent a new poetic language of understatements and indirections, a language that was the dream of all European poets who came to Australia and felt the existential disconnect with the place. Even James McAuley wondered 'what sort of language – vocabulary, diction, syntax, style – would work or not work?' in Australian poetry after the fifties (112). McAuley offered a solution very similar to Kefala's: 'the poems are written mainly in a language of immediate experience or recollected impressions, and any view of the world they offer is suggested by this means and not by declared theoretical or doctrinal framework' (115). In 'Towards a Language', Kefala describes in almost analogous terms the time she actually understood that she had found her voice 'with a feeling of levitation, of having escaped the constraints of gravity. The climate, the landscape, my own inner release coincided to give me a feeling of euphoria' (*Writer's Journey* 27). The correspondence between the formal achievement and the existential semiosis is what creates her late style, in the sense that Edward Said gave to the term, that its prerogative is that:

> it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile. (Said 57)

Kefala's late style is made of the linguistic traces of different crossings and encounters, which lead to an existential liberation from its own conditions of production. Her late poems become *post-cultural openings* towards new configurations of experience and aesthetic significations. They indicate a new dramatic structure of being that transcends the parameters of their constituting elements. Her minimalistic forms generate an existential and semantic surplus that needs a closer and more *poietic* approach. Almost fifty years after her first publication it would be fair to see her work as poetry and not as a documentation of an era.

2. Within language

After the movement towards the new language had been completed in the late 1980s, Kefala's poetic voice entered a period of self-reflexivity culminating with *Absence* (1992). Such self-reflexivity indicated a consolidation of semiotic potentialities in her voice with the masterful control of nuance and connotation. In her *Sydney Journals* (2008), Kefala, after watching a documentary on Jack Kerouac, observes:

> Ginsberg saying that Kerouac trained like an athlete before starting to write. But we all try to help this inner process by constantly making space for it, more and more space, so that finally our lives are hollowed out and the space is taken to produce these few lines. (222)

This observation, which can be read as a remarkably rare self-comment, is extremely apt relative to her own work as the poet enters a language, constructs her idiom and struggles to make more space 'for the few lines'.

During this period of her work, we find a marked change in the density of her verses and the transparency of her symbols. In the *Alien* and *Thirsty Weather*, the 'we' of an imaginary collectivity appears, as in George Seferis' *Mythestorema*:

> We returned to our homes broken,
> limbs incapable, mouths cracked
> by the tastes of rust and brine.
> When we woke we travelled towards the north, strangers
> plunged into mist by the immaculate wings of swans that
> wounded us. […]
> We brought back
> these carved reliefs of a humble art. (3)

But after the establishment of the tonality of an imagined collectivity, the language itself becomes the subject of Kefala's search for self-reflexion. The poetic voice has framed a semantic field of problematisation and self-questioning as she proceeds with a mature encounter with English. The 'we' is gradually replaced by an 'I' or even an impersonal narrative voice, as the poet pushes the limits of her idiom towards absolute expressive and semantic minimalism. Elizabeth Bishop describes a similar situation of liminality in expression when she writes:

> Writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural. Most of the poet's energies are really directed towards this goal: to convince himself (perhaps, with luck, eventually some readers) that what he's up to and what he's saying is really an inevitable, *only* natural way of behaving under the circumstances. (Bishop 326)

The extreme condensation that we see in the mature works of poets, including Kefala, is precisely about the quest for behaving *naturally* under the circumstances of another language. Indeed, since 1992, the self-reflexivity of her poems quite frequently becomes the actual content of the poem. The new tonality permeates Kefala's works, abandoning the grand national or mythological narratives. Already from her early poems we can detect what Elizabeth Bishop, writing of Marianne Moore, describes as an 'unmannered originality of simplicity' (qtd in

Conarroe 31). In this way, Kefala avoids the aggrandising narratives that dominated high Modernism and especially Seferis, until his last poems. So, too, she avoids the measured and balanced irony of C. P. Cavafy, whom she admires. She also maintains certain traces of reflexivity that became dominant in postwar Greek poetry. Poets like Zoe Karelli, Minas Demakis and the early Kiki Dimoula tried a tonality of language that, despite its connection to prewar Modernists, evoked completely different emotional experiences. 'We left, /' Dimakis writes in one of his best poems: 'But we stayed nowhere / we parted halfway / we left / but we were not saved / we were lost / amongst other faces / gaining only / one more oblivion' (Dimakis 27). Kefala knew of such poetic voices and tonalities long before writing in English. (Here we must add the latent presence of Romanian poetry, especially Mihai Eminescu and probably Nichita Stanescu, which needs further exploration.) In postwar European poetry more broadly, similar experiments in tonality and sparseness are evident in the poetry of French poets Jacques Prévert and Yves Bonnefoy, as well as the sparse and hermetic poetry of Italians Eugenio Montale, Giuseppe Ungaretti and Salvatore Quasimodo. To similar effect, Kefala also avoids inflated rhetoric and verbal manipulation of the reader, aiming for a 'pure poesy' of mood, meditative lyricism and evocative allusions, close to the Italian hermeticists.

But the new tonality represents a departure and a quest: it represents the fall of grand narratives that nurtured the catastrophes of the 1940s. Irony, whenever found in Kefala's work, is mostly self-irony, an implied distancing from her own expectations and illusions. There is something lyrical and elegiac in this poetry, reminiscent of Sappho's archaic and austere verses as well as of the Byzantine nun-poet Cassiane and her pious resignation to her own mortality – a certain tonality of compunction and contrition referring to the human condition and not to any religious faith. Indeed, the lack of any gestures towards religion is something that differentiates Kefala from deeply religious poets like the late

James McAuley or even naturalist transcendentalist poets like Judith Wright. Her irreligiosity, however, is strongly supplanted by a profound reverence towards existence, which brings her problematically close to an existentialist understanding of human contingency.

But the purity of language also indicates a new vision of being, as if the poet explores now the content of her experiences within the English language. It's her experiences within language – the English language more specifically – that recalibrate her previous anthropological vision and her personal mythology. In her *European Notebook* (1998), place maintains its strong symbolic presence and visibility. In *Absence*, such visibility is lost and derealised. The transition is obvious and can be explained with reference to the wider choices that she made in the 1980s, by which time she feels strong enough to reinvent the forms she chose to embody her vision.

Kefala is primarily a poet, and like every other poet celebrates the freedom that any poetic form offers. Every other approach to her work is a projection of personal ideas onto the work itself, and as projection it must be treated with extreme caution and reserve as belonging to the reception of her work. The poetic work speaks for itself, but it is also something more than the total sum of its references and produces a new language that transcends the total sum of its interpretations, which therefore makes it open to reinterpretation. Kefala is one of the most interesting cases to see the creative process as a dynamic activity in front of our very eyes. Her sparse elliptical lyrics, her inimitable ability to grasp the ephemeral in epigrammatic lines and her empathic vision of a world devoid of fragmenting categories makes the formal space of her work a unique field of the self-conscious cultural imaginary of a specific period in time.

Kefala belongs to a class of *translingual* writers who live and create by moving between languages and therefore through asymmetric realities. Dimitris Tsaloumas, a fellow Greek who wrote in both languages, is another translingual poet who gave

his best poems in English and not in Greek, his native tongue, as linguistic articulation itself became for him the battlefield of *negative capabilities* through its incongruous osmosis with English. As I observed elsewhere after his death:

> It would be more accurate to call Tsaloumas, a translingual writer, who lived through symbiotic linguistic realities, imagined his self through interconnected linguistic potentialities and objectified what he called 'the truth of his living' through a variety of verbal symbols evoking their interactive networks of meaning, sentiment and reference. ('Translingualism')

Tsaloumas was a classical poet who loved the perfected form in order to tame and appease conflict and tension. Kefala's verbal world is the exact opposite. She avoids the patriarchal certainties of an inflated rhetorical style, or Tsaloumas' love (or indeed Slessor's) of complex and intricate forms. She is closer to Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore, and the more existential work of poets like Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and Yannis Ritsos, with their loose, epigrammatic and elusive formal arrangements framing fleeting moments of profound epiphanies. For this reason, the concept of *the present* is probably the most crucial key required to enter the verbal cartography of Kefala, especially in her late work. Again, Tsaloumas, another poet from the same tradition, talks about 'the distant present' and about the invisible mechanisms that make the present so hostile and negative (25). One of Kefala's most interesting and significant poems, from the *Absence* collection, is titled 'The Absolute Present'. Here, she talks about how 'the present that comes / is self-sufficient and sheds / constantly the everyday / that useless burden' (134–5). In key ways, this poem can be seen to frame the central imaginative structures of her late work. This work indicates a movement, a kinetic quest for what can be seen in its etymological reference as an absolute, unconditioned, totally free *nowness*, a moment of here and now

that liberates what the philosopher Byung-Chul Han called 'the paradox of the present' (36).

This is probably one of the most crucial parameters of her late work. Kefala experiences the present in a dialogic connection with the subliminal projections that float around our everyday reality – the simple experience of being here and now, an experience of deep emotional energy and the confluence of somehow contradictory and paradoxical realities. Such emotional energy brings to the fore unexpected images of concrete and crystal-clear reality, which are so vivid that they are transformed to their exact opposite, to what Sigmund Freud called, after his own experience on the Acropolis, derealisation.

The achievement of a pure poetic language irreducible to its cultural parameters creates an analogous feeling of *Entfremdungsgefühl:* a feeling and a propensity for derealisation. 'It is too good to be true' became, in her verses, 'it is too true to be good'. The real is overturned by its own materiality. It is derealised because it is so true. Ultimately, the real has become an absence because of its intense and illuminating presence *here and now.* In other words, her poetry is the encapsulation of self-conscious temporality in the way that we see expressions of a similar mnemonic experience in Marcel Proust's grand novel. The question of time within space has become the central *desideratum* of her work, especially in her latest poems. We use the Latin word deliberately here because it indicates desire, a certain negative *jouissance*, because it is necessary to look at her poetry not simply as a footnote to an era but as a hypertext of concealed experience.

Kefala understands absence as a constant reminder of lived experience, made out of the verbal reconstruction of Proust's involuntary memory. Her work is of crucial significance in the literary history of this country, to which she belongs. I think that the time when we wanted to find single or singular allegiance is rather also gone. Belonging is both constitutional (it refers to cultural structures) but also constitutive (it creates the poetic subject). Writers have multiple identities, and the uniqueness of

their style is constituted out of such multiplicities. Kefala's poetry is the space of many singularities and asymmetries.

Within Australian tradition, James McAuley tried to do something analogous in his less partisan poems. In his 'Credo', for example, he writes: 'That each thing is a word / Requiring us to speak it: / From the ant to the quasar, / from clouds to ocean floor- / The meaning not ours, but found, / in the mind deeply submissive / to the grammar of existence, / the syntax of the real' (43). Within each language there is a specific syntax of the real, and what translingual poets do is to expand its fields of reference and its networks of communicative connections.

Yet the entrance into another language becomes, in all its dramatic unfolding, in itself an act of self-extinction. In Kefala's work we can infer a deep foundational trauma, a sense of loss and fragility, of absence and more specifically of disappearance. In fact, the Greek word *aphanisis*, as employed by Jacques Lacan to indicate the fading of the subject and its consequent understanding of itself vis-à-vis something other than themselves or something outside of themselves in radical departure from the principle of its identity, is a heuristic tool more appropriate to explore and investigate the poetic subjectivity of her works. The ontogenesis of the subject takes place within the new language, and yet, as Lacan indicated, 'there is no subject without, somewhere, *aphanisis*, of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division that the dialectic of the subject is established' (Lacan 221).

In her poetry the fading subject is othering itself through or even because of the trauma of deracination. If, as Simone Weil observed, the need for roots is at the heart of the human project, then the lost roots, or the roots that are transformed into memory and symbols, are also transformed into post-linguistic signifiers. The subject fades away, indeed disappears totally and articulates itself as pure temporality and spatiality. In a similar way, Emily Dickinson talked about her encounter with death and 'Since then– 'tis Centuries and yet / Feels shorter than the Day / I first surmised the Horses' Heads / Were toward Eternity–'

(Dickinson 152). The derealisation process and the *aphanisis* experience are the most dynamic parameters of her work, as they encapsulate its unconcealed tensions and formal realisations, which converge in her language. The process also expresses the complex and somehow paradoxical responses to reality that Kefala's poetry articulates because, following Martin Heidegger in its very essence, 'the poem gathers together and gives a dwelling to the absent deities' (Heidegger 92). The absent deities, either chthonic or symbolic, stand of the unity between time, space and poetic activity that ultimately discloses the encounter with the real and the real as other.

Kefala's subject is not the grand romantic 'I' that romanticises nature or the neoclassical superego of a high moral theory or, indeed, the postmodern diffused and centreless subject. (This subject can be seen in some poems by Tsaloumas, for example, or Les Murray, Michael Dransfield or, indeed, Rosemary Dobson and Dorothy Porter). Her poetic subject is transformed into a dialectical synchronicity: what is here at hand is also absent. And what is absent mnemonically is also here. They coexist in the *aesthetic togetherness* of the text and in what has been called by Dylan Trigg 'the oneirism of wakefulness', as the mind can never be oblivious of its own thinking (195). As Kefala develops her world, the voice becomes diffused, almost unfocalised, as if an all-seeing eye moves over space autonomously and in a somehow disembodied detachment from the real. Space has become a terrifying presence, but its presence is also a marker of what is not here, a vestige of a desired continuity. Space is gradually transformed or indeed gains its full intensity as a living and animate reality. Kefala's space, wherever she is, pulsates with such invisible presences. Such simultaneity of temporalities is probably another dominant characteristic of her late verse in which the issue of mortality takes some of its most unsettling manifestations.

From her first collection in 1973 until her more recent works, the poetic idiom of Kefala is characterised by layers of successive concealments, together with an austere symmetry of

form intertwined with a complex existential meditation on the meaning of the act of creation, bringing her close to poets like Elizabeth Bishop. The formal foundation of her work is focused on the gravitational force of verbs and nouns and the poetry of adverbs. Very few other parts of language appear in her verses, as if the poetic subject exists in a de-territorialised abstracted landscape consisting of geometric shapes, forms and designs without adjectival differentiations. The atmosphere of lack and loss frames a sparse language infused with the phenomenology of angst and fear in the sense of a post-tragic vision of life.

My suggestion is that it is time to unframe her work from the shackles of the reverential or *otherising* approaches, and we must see it as an open textual space in constant transignification by its readers first within the Australian context and then within the changing discourses of global poetry. Michalis Tsianikas has talked about this in his study as he dealt with her poems as processes for new meanings emerging through the osmosis of different linguistic capabilities as it is 'language full of music and time' (185). In her work, a transparent, luminous and vibrant language circumscribes a dark, gloomy and dematerialised world. This oxymoron itself will make her work an invaluable cultural capital, even if it is not included in the official histories of literature.

Kefala will remain a challenge and probably an enigma to a hegemonic reading and interpretation of literature, and this defines her continuing presence in most current cultural, literary and social conversations about identity, memory and belonging. She is one of the most important poets who has managed to *decentre* mainstream poetic writing in Australia and articulate a language of *heterologies*. Hence the suggestion that we must take her work as the springboard for exploring the heterological element in Australian writing as found in various voices and diverse discursive practices that have proliferated since the 1980s but still remain outside the canon (even while the idea of canon has been rebuked and rejected). Michel de Certeau's use of

the term as against the totalising 'principle of the identity of thought and being' offers an endless imaginative potential for the rearticulation of the history of the present in Australian literary and social experience (vii).

Kefala's poetry asks 'What are we searching for? / We ask about the past / a story we have not heard / before, surprised at the / remoteness of the characters' (*Absence* 135). The poet addresses the question of memory as an *othering* mechanism in the present – *othering* and not *otherising*, however. The present itself becomes the gathering point for more semiotic openings. The opaqueness and the self-validation of a closed discourse opens up both semantically and formally in order to deal with the multiplicity and the ambivalence of the real. Kefala stresses: 'Language, in order to remain alive, must maintain its direct relationship to experience' ('Writer's Journey' 37). I feel that this is a climate in which it is very difficult for a writer to write. This is not a language that anyone can utilise to express fundamental human issues in order to talk about such ontological issues; her poetry had to traverse the territory of absence and disappearance and create the formal openings through which new territories of poetic thinking and gathering emerged. Through them, the direct relationship to experience can be easily seen and felt, restoring the task of the poet to unconceal and uncover the fundamental complexities of being and the colliding significations about its historical presence: 'We move into the new / morning, unaware / full of the weightless / burden' (*Fragments* 59).

Works cited

Bishop, Elizabeth. *Prose*, edited by Lloyd Schwartz, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Byung-Chul Han. *The Scent of Time*, translated by Daniel Steuer, New York, Polity, 2019.

Certeau, Michel de. *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other*, translated by Brain Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Conarroe, Joel. *Eight American Poets: An Anthology*, New York, Vintage Books, 1997.

Couani, Anna. 'Introduction'. *Journeys*, Antigone Kefala, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2019.

Dickinson, Emily. *Selected Poems and Letters*, edited by Robert N. Linscott, New York, Anchor Books, 1959.

Digby, Jenny. Interview: Antigone Kefala: A Labyrinthian Linguistic Field'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by V. Karalis & H. Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013.

Dimakis, Minas. *Dark Passage*, Athens, Difros, 1957.

Elliott, Brian. *The Jindyworobaks*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1979.

Freud, Sigmund. 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis', in *The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11: On Metapsychology: The Theory Of Psychoanalysis: Beyond The Pleasure Principle; The Ego And The Id And Other Works*, London, Penguin, 1991.

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by A. Hofstadter, New York, Harper Perennial, 2013.

Kane, Paul. *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Karalis, Vrasilis. 'The Poetics of Ellipsis in Antigone Kefala's Poetry'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasilis Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2016, pp. 254–72.

—— 'Translingualism, Home, Ambivalence: The Poet Dimitris Tsaloumas', *Cordite Poetry Review*, 1 August 2016, http://cordite.org.au/scholarly/translingualism-home/, accessed on 15 July 2019.

Kefala, Antigone. *The Alien*. Sydney, Makar, 1973.

—— 'The Boarding House', in *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975, pp. 85–127.

—— *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *European Notebook*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988.

—— *Absence: New and Selected Poems*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1992, 1998.

—— *Sydney Journals: Reflections 1970–2000*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.

—— *Max: The Confessions of a Cat*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2009.

—— 'Towards a Language'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis & Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013.

—— *Fragments*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2016.

—— *Journeys*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2019.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, 1963–1964*, translated by Alan Sheridan, London, Norton & Co, 1998.

McAuley, James. *Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary*, edited by Leonie Kramer, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988.

Rowe, Noel. *Modern Australian Poets*, Sydney University Press, 1994.

Said, Edward. *On Late Style*, New York, Vintage, 2007.

Seferis, George. *Complete Poems (Mythestorema)*, translated by Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard, Vancouver, Anvil Press Poetry, 1995.

Trigg, Dylan. *Topophobia: A Phenomenology of Anxiety*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017.

Tsvetaeva, Marina. *Art in the Light of Conscience: Eight Essays on Poetry*, translated by Angela Livingstone, Newcastle, Bloodaxe Books, 2010.

Tsianikas, Michalis. 'Alexia: Antigone Kefalas' Overdue Fairytale'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasilis Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2016, pp. 171–87.

Weil, Simone. *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, translated by Arthur Wills, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2004.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, London, Routledge, 1961.

Wright, Judith. *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1965.

6

Dreams in Kefala's Prose Stories

Kate Livett

> Recounting of dreams is … an essential part of the narrative in Kefala's work. Dreams are an integral part of the story. … The narrative is a complete story, not just through the conscious mind and words, but the unconscious, reflecting the protagonist's troubled existence: '… the nights were full of dark, agitated dreams' (*The Island*).
>
> (Helen Nickas, 'Re-deeming the Past: Personal and Cultural Memory in the Work of Antigone Kefala', 195)

Helen Nickas points to the importance of dreams in *The Island*; however, dreams are consistently and extensively used by Kefala in *all* of her prose writings. In this essay I will consider and

compare the operations of dream representation across her prose texts: 'The First Journey' (1975), 'The Boarding House' (1975), *The Island* (1984), 'Intimacy' (2002), 'Summer Visit' (2002) and 'Conversations with Mother' (2002). As the analysis of dreams in literature is methodologically vexed, even despite the similarity between Freud's identification of the four key operations of 'dreamwork' and the techniques of literary language,[1] I propose to outline the method I will be using to analyse dreams before moving on to a more detailed discussion of Kefala's texts.

In terms of their content, the dreams in Kefala's prose works are obsessed with dying and death, and many of them are not so much dreams as nightmares. Death – its effects, its presence, its imminence – is one of Kefala's major philosophical, aesthetic and existential concerns. It is also a fundamental subject of dreams *in general,* for Freud at least, since his first writings on dreams. I want to establish first the key functions of dreams in Freud's theorisation – their relationship with death, their primary fidelity to the dreamer's ego, and the 'work' they do as psychic processing of trauma and loss – and then examine each of Kefala's stories in chronological order, explicating where dreams are doing work common to all the dreams in Kefala's prose oeuvre, and where they have operations particular to the specific text in question.

Alongside the shared characteristic of dream narration across Kefala's prose works is the consistent autobiographical note in each. With a trajectory of degrees from least ('The First Journey') to most autobiographical ('Conversations with Mother'), the stories all feature elements of similarity with Kefala's own history and life. In light of this, I also want to consider the interconnection of dreams and autobiographical elements in Kefala's work. These compelling threads, which tie the prose works together, mandate the reading of all Kefala's prose works as parts of a single project, and illuminate functions of these dreams not apparent outside of such a collective or interrelated reading. Responding thus to the texts themselves, and taking a cue from Judith Brett (126–37), I argue that Kefala's prose works can be read as one continuous

Bildungs/Künstlerroman in which the protagonist's education and experience develops across the oeuvre.

By taking these prose works as a chronological Bildungsroman that spans Kefala's writing life, the works reveal hitherto inaccessible meanings. It becomes clear that in Kefala's prose stories: dreams make explicit the characters' divided selves; dreams reassert the centrality of the ego for the female artist/narrator who is at risk of being subsumed or sidelined; dreams betray a fear of death and sometimes prefigure it as well; dreams create metaphorical and symbolic connections between death as a general sense of loss and death in specific formations; and dreams provide a narrative space in which to depict, explicitly, the psyche's struggle with specific deaths, through the two possible conditions that Freud identifies as the subject's way of dealing with death: namely, mourning and melancholy.

In her discussion of the importance of the Bildungsroman for Kefala, Judith Brett focused on 'The First Journey' and *The Island* (Brett 128). I want to extend this reading to encompass the three stories in *Summer Visit* as well. Across these stories, Kefala expresses those aspects of self-creation most important to and difficult for a female writer, a migrant female writer living in New Zealand and then Sydney, whose sense of history and culture was one estranged from her immediate environment. Their gendered particularity – as *female* Bildungsromane – creates the specific meaning-effects of the dream descriptions in Kefala's novellas: dreams provide the mechanism to show the reader the complexities of female subjectivity in relation to culture and artistic production.[2] As Brett argues, '[t]he Bildungsroman has been a genre shaped by men for writing about men' (137), though Brett herself identifies Melina's experience in *The Island* as an example of a female Bildungsroman (128–37). The female Bildungsroman is known to be a genre that both stems from and challenges the conventions of the male Bildungsroman, through concerns specific to women's gendered experience (Joannou, Kleinbord Labovitz, Hankins, Castle). Particularly problematic

for female protagonists of the genre is the issue of marriage (Kleinbord Labovitz 7), a repeated difficulty experienced by Kefala's protagonists, and one negotiated in and through dreams.[3]

Kefala's use of dreams is legible as what Ronald R. Thomas argues, in his seminal book on dreams in English literature, is a post-Freud representation of dreams (Thomas 255–90). Whatever the particular artist's thoughts about Freud and psychoanalysis may be, Thomas argues, in the post-Freud twentieth century dreams cannot but be regarded in psychoanalytic terms as, to at least some degree, manifestations of the unconscious whose discovery we attribute to Freud. Post Freud, dreams are evidence that we are not 'under our own control', that we are strangers to ourselves (Borch-Jacobsen 7). We are able to have thoughts and feelings that we believe in in our waking minds, but to which our dreams testify the exact opposite: the divided self. Like other Modernist and Postmodernist writers, Kefala represents dreams because they are part of the total reality of our sense of self and our experience of the world. Freud was the first to identify this problem that 'the Unconscious' posed for our understanding of reality, and therefore the problem it posed for modern writers trying to represent that reality. As Lyndsey Stonebridge puts it: 'Freud was attempting to understand a thoroughly modern dilemma: how can we narrate our life stories when so much happens to us unconsciously; what kind of knowledge is unconscious knowledge and what sort of writing might capture it?' (274). The post-Freud conception of dreams also encourages us to 'analyse' the dreams for the hidden, unconscious wishes that they reveal in the dreamer. This can lead to interpretative difficulties when considering dreams in literature, as Freud's aims as a scientist seeking to explain the 'truth' of the mind – and to cure patients of illness – are not identical to the aims of the literary critic. Nevertheless, the critic cannot ignore Freud's theories, the extent of their influence, and the striking similarities between 'dreamwork' as Freud defined it – including condensation and secondary revision – and the techniques used by creative writers.[4]

Accordingly, I propose to read the dreams represented in Kefala's texts as symbolic and metaphorical representations in the thoughts/minds of the textual characters – testimonies to what the dreamer is thinking and feeling in a mode that is not 'under their control', but that does not need to be 'analysed' to the extent of searching for the 'dream wish' hidden in the dream. That is the task of psychoanalysis. To read a written character's dreams, then, is to attribute them with an unconscious, for the period of the dream-telling, at least. To read the dreams at their surface imagery, in their 'manifest' (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* 210), or literal, content[5] is to view the dreams as additional evidence of the beliefs, thoughts and feelings that are written onto the page as statements from their waking 'lives'.

Dreams do have basic generic qualities that can be brought to readings of literary dreams, in the literary sense of the term genre. Specifically, there are two key aspects that are useful here: firstly, the inherent egotism of the dream, and secondly, the dream's association with death. Any dream is always about the 'I', or the ego of the dreamer. As Freudian theorist Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen puts it: 'the ego is everywhere in the dream' (21).[6] Although the many 'I's that appear in dreams may not be identical to the 'I' of the conscious subject, presentations of the self in any literary representation of a dream can be read as part of the identity construction of the character who is telling their dream.

Death is another 'generic' quality of dreams. The relationship between dreams and death hovers throughout Freud's own writings and in many analyses of dreams in literature. Philosopher Elizabeth Bronfen identifies the centrality of the issue of death in the patient's dream that Freud analyses that makes him reflect on the underdevelopment of his own dream-theory. The dream was dreamt by a father, about his (in reality) dead child, who returns in the dream (Bronfen 143–4). Bronfen writes:

> It seems that in his poetic journey through dreamscapes Freud had his analytic eye focused on death as the vanishing point of

> the real; the motto he chooses for his Interpretation of Dreams implies this: *Flectere si nequeo superos, acheronta movebo* ('If I cannot bend heaven, I will move hell'). Juno uses these words in Virgil's *Aeneid* to summon Alecto from the underworld. (146)[7]

Freud uses the Latin here, and texts from the ancient world of Greek and Roman mythology, doubly appropriate in this reading of Kefala's prose texts, in which mythology is a subtle, ever-present part of their fabric, like the more explicit presence of death in all of the dreams in Kefala's prose.

'The First Journey'

Dreams and death saturate 'The First Journey', a male Bildungs/Künstlerroman set in Romania, in which the narrator's dreams emphasise his sense of being a doubled 'I'; they enact narrative prefiguring of the events – love and death – that will enable his move into adulthood, and they provide a highlighted space in which his psychic struggle to cope with death can be presented to the reader. In the first dream told in the first-person narrative, several pages after the beginning of the story, the first two of these three common operations of the dream in Kefala's works are clear. Firstly, the reader is introduced to Alexi's sense of being 'two', of having a Doppelgänger, the European artistic trope of the haunted, doubled self. Secondly, the actual death in the narrative of 'The First Journey' is prefigured, symbolically, by the dream-image that Alexi describes:

> In the dream, that night, I was going up a spiral staircase in an empty white house. I was with someone else. I and another I. Sometimes I was I, and sometimes the other person.
>
> … out of the moving darkness … a terrifying shape approached … [a] black-clad figure, carved in stone, rising high,

> higher than a house, a tree, although I could not see it clearly, its feet enormous, its legs and trousers tall as columns, the head lost somewhere in the density of the mist above.
>
> … Then it divided. Out of its legs two women appeared and kept beckoning, they both had the same face and moved like identically carved figures placed to decorate symmetrically the pedestal of a statue. They were enticing me in silence, half smiling, very friendly, in identical repetitive movements, trying to persuade me to advance. And I was hoping to resist.
>
> And as I watched them they disappeared and the mist dissolved and there was nothing there but the little square bathed in sunshine, the eternal grocer still leaning against the door. But the second I had disappeared. (15–17)

This dream prefigures the Bildung he undergoes, in which he falls in love with Mme Caragea, but this potential is immediately cut off by her illness and then death. Representing death and desire as interwoven figures, the dream continues beyond the crisis it prefigures, to prophesise Alexi's capacity to survive. The dream depicts the disappearance of the 'second I' at the end of the dream, his sense of internal division resolving, and, also, the reassertion of the non-threatening, ordinary life of the 'eternal' town square – an environment of the stable quotidian that implies a functional social subject.

But his passage to functional adult subjectivity is not assured, and the dreams at the end of the story show his psychic struggle between mourning and a dangerous melancholy. His first real love dies: 'A month had passed since she had died' (80). Confronted with this death, his psyche is able to continue only in its split, doppelgänger form: 'And I went about my life as if I had become two people' (81). This is during the day. During the night, he goes on mythic journeys as his psyche tries to come to terms with Mme Caragea's death and integrate it into his conception of reality. It is through dreams that this journey is enacted:

> When night came the apparently secure boundaries of the world would collapse and … I went down, further and further down, as if the black centre of the earth had suddenly acquired a magnetic potential, pulling me down.
>
> Then I was sitting at a desk, in a lecture room, in an office? Had been sitting there for months, for years, familiar, tiring in its continuous burdensomeness.
>
> Then someone said – such is life, my dear – in a voice full of social sympathy as one uses with sick people – you will have to accept it – and I got up and left the room.
>
> And then I knew in a second that she had died. And I was alone. Forever alone. (81–2)

The struggle here is between the psyche that is 'the black centre of the earth', and the social world of the superego, the 'desk … lecture room … office', a space that requires that the 'reality principle' be accepted, that death happens, 'such is life', 'you will have to accept it'. He leaves the room, in a last gesture of resistance to this acceptance, but the acceptance must happen, the reality principle must be reasserted. This is hypertactically followed by his 'knowledge' 'that she had died', and that this death is a loss to himself. This connection marks the dangerous possibility of normal mourning crossing into pathological melancholy in which death becomes felt as a loss of the self.

Alexi is caught between mourning and melancholy in this dream. Freud defined mourning as the normal aggrieved adjustment by the pysche after the love-object dies / is lost – a process in which it retracts the libido from its entanglement with the dead loved one and eventually alters its picture of 'reality' to accommodate the new reality in which the loved one is absent (Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 244–5). The melancholic, on the other hand, introjects the loss back into the self, identifying with the lost love-object, and therefore experiencing an ongoing condition of the sense of having lost something from the self

(250–4). Alexi's dream almost explicitly announces his sensation of loss as a loss of his self:

> And then I knew that I would not survive this loss. Knew this in a sharp instant that left me dazed and then a sadness filled me, a sadness for her death and for my inevitable one, that was coming, coming slowly as I advanced. … And so I advanced clutching at my desperation, my whole body fighting it, … the loss I knew I would not survive. And the emptiness that filled that narrow stretch of corridor seemed unbearable. (82–3)

This dream is the narrativised representation of his psyche's struggle to process the death of a loved one. Although mourning and melancholy have similar symptoms, one is a normative psychic process that has an end, whereas the other is a pathological condition, an alteration to identity itself.[8] What we read in his dream is the establishment of the condition of melancholy that then seems confirmed by the subsequent 'waking' scene, in which Alexi is staring out the window, thinking of the souls of the dead, of the loss in death, even in the midst of the new life of spring (83).

'The Boarding House'

'The Boarding House' deploys dreams to make explicit the female protagonist's sense of a divided – in this case, self-alienated – self, to portray the fear of death and to prefigure parental death. Furthermore, the story connects all these aspects of death to the character's condition of estranged transition; she is residing in a Sydney boarding house, having left her lover or husband, Richard, and her parents, in New Zealand.

The narrator Melina's first dream begins with a scene in which she tries to protect an imago of herself, a fragile, scared child who 'had that desperate dying look of starving children'

and who 'was crying in a squeaky, piercing voice, sobbing after someone that had not come yet although it was already dark' (88). A car arrives in the darkness, with windows 'covered by newspapers so that we could not see who was inside' and which 'stood there purring evilly in the deep silence, the all-seeing eye behind the newspapers grinning devilishly' (89). Having shifted from a potential assistance, the car becomes a malign threat, and the child screams and its body of straw elongates surrealistically into the night, at which point Melina wakes. The dream seems to be over but its feeling or sensation of threat continues, and Melina thinks that 'in the menacing silence of the house someone is coming up the stairs, slowly, waiting for the cry of each step to die' (89). Then the threat fades as the person goes into one of the other rooms. Melina gets out of bed, watches out the window; then the description slides into another dream, or memory, or both, of a man whom the dreamer obviously identifies as the man (Richard) she has left before the story opens, a figure who is slightly menacing in the dream (90).

Melina's exit from her relationship with Richard is a situation full of fear, the dream tells us, that threatens to destroy the dreamer's self. Echoing Freud's distinction between 'preliminary' and 'main' dreams (which are, in his analyses, always related), Melina's dreamwork presents the 'cause' of her threatened-self dream *after* the dream in which its effects are being felt by the psyche, after the scene in which the narrator's self is threatened – a scene in which the affect is a direct consequence of the narrative actions told in the second part of the dream. In this 'education', this Bildung, in the pressure of an overwhelming relationship, the disintegration of the female's very sense of self is threatened.

As with 'The First Journey', dreams prefigure death, but in 'The Boarding House' the death is an ersatz one. It is presented in the waking world of the text but in language and imagery that, itself, mimics a dream through the logic of condensation and secondary revision ('secondary elaboration'). Freud identifies these techniques as the means by which the 'censor' turns the

latent content (the dream wish) into the manifest content of the dream (the actual images and narratable 'story' of the dream).[9] Just as, in Freud's theorisation of dreamwork, one of the techniques of the dream is to 'condense' a figure in the dream, so that a person may be oneself, one's mother, the queen and one's aunt at the same time,[10] the child that Melina nurses in the first stage of the dream is symbolic of herself but also the elderly boarding-house owner, Mrs Webster: 'She cries now silently, the tears falling over the intricate pattern of her cheeks. She wipes them from time to time and her unpainted mouth is hurt and vulnerable like a child's'. (109) A mirroring condensation in which the narrator's parents are symbols for Mrs Webster occurs in a second dream in 'The Boarding House' that portrays the loss of the parents through her emigration to Sydney[11] and prefigures the (ersatz) death of Mrs Webster. Mrs Webster is, herself, afraid of death, as she tells the narrator (109), and becomes upset by the ubiquity of death: the sudden death of two neighbours; the death of her pet budgie (109); another neighbour's, Mrs Swann's, obsession with death (110–11). The alcoholic, mentally broken 'old men of this big city', like Fred, one of the residents of the boarding house, on whom Mrs Webster has taken pity, live as though they are already dead. '[T]heir eyes washed out and dead' (116) seem to induce death in the narrator, contagiously: 'A great emptiness follows [Fred] as if he has sucked away the air of the night and one suffocates' (116).

Despite all this death in 'The Boarding House', the reality of death that the narrator experiences in her Bildung, when she is called to the morgue to identify the body of a woman presumed to be Mrs Webster, is itself unreal and dreamlike. In its heightening of sensation, perception and mental agitation, the experience is rendered like a dream. Unlike the other novellas/stories, which are bookended with dreams, 'The Boarding House' has no concluding dream. Instead, the narrator's bus trip to the morgue, viewing of the body, and return bus trip to the boarding house serves as an ersatz dream (just as the deaths in the story

are themselves ersatz), indicated by the dreamlike narration of this event. In an assertion that the text itself renders ambiguous through the dreamlike rhetoric of this section of the story, Melina denies that the corpse is Mrs Webster. 'I only have to tell [the morgue attendant] if I recognize her … "No, no," I say, "I don't … it is not the same person … she is far too young …"' (123). Of course, this could be the displacement of reality via temporal obfuscation: 'she is far too young' evokes the common lament expressed as disbelief upon seeing – and recognising – the dead for exactly who they are: 's/he was far too young to die!' Through metaphorical writing that evokes dreamwork, Melina's denial of Mrs Webster's death transfers death from one known and familiar individual to all others, to the unknown generality of death. In the bus on the way home, Melina feels that all the people riding on the bus are dead:

> they come in at every stop with lime blue faces. Deformed, hunch-backed people, all with the same frozen antiseptic look. Under the neon lights they all look dead. Chalk white. I can see them stretched, white and freckled on endless aluminium trays.
>
> But they are moving. Each carrying his death inside him, an unseen grain, in their very skins, in their very eyes, the same glassy death smelling of iodine and frozen meat. (123–4)

The dreamlike images in Melina's conscious use the literary technique common to Modernist writers, as Ronald R. Thomas has argued. 'Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Conrad's Marlow, and Beckett's chorus of skeptics exhibit a preference for impressionistic and dreamlike statements that once invite and defy interpretation', says Thomas. 'It might be said that the characteristic form of Modernist novels resembles what Freud called the tactics of dream-work much more than the tactics of the dream interpretation' (258). In 'The Boarding House', the presentation of reality as dreamlike allows Kefala to maintain an ambiguity that prevents foreclosure of the story with any particular 'tone': Mrs Webster's

death has both occurred and *not* occurred, and the tone of the story can continue as both sad and joyous, paradoxically.

After the bus ride described above, the narrator returns to the boarding house to discover Mrs Webster has returned from a day's visiting. In her joy at Mrs Webster's still being alive, it is as though the narrator awakens from a nightmare. She experiences disconnected jumps in affect – the terror of the nightmare suddenly shifts to happiness and relief at its fiction – that cannot be shared, sensorily, with others. 'I laugh suddenly relieved, a great weight seems to be lifting. Thank God she is alive' (124). This relief, this death avoided, brings back a memory to Melina of her own Grandmother Sofia, whose dead body she was not allowed to see (125–6). The line between these deaths, from her grandmother to Mrs Webster to her own imminent death, and the life that goes on anyway, the seasons changing, 'the clean artlessness of light that falls over all things – uninvolved. The ultimate betrayal of life' (126) is also what galvanises her to move beyond the shadow of death that the breakup of the relationship has caused. She says 'I must get up. Start doing something. If I were to die today what would I have to show for my life?' (126). Other people continue to 'move in a dream' (127), but she has 'woken up' to the life drive.

The fear of and ubiquity of death in 'The Boarding House', played out with the fake death of Mrs Webster, is enacted in *The Island*, Kefala's next novella, in the direct form of the fear of the loved ones' deaths, portrayed explicitly in the narrator's dreams but more explicitly in this novella conflicting with the libidinal, sexual life drive. Again, the narrator is called Melina, and again dreams depict the fear of death. Here the fear of the mother's death is tied to the fearful and death-obsessed mood of mourning and melancholy for the losses of the past held by the older relatives, the narrator's aunt, her friend Loula, and the university professor with his stultifying presentations of the past. These concerns and this atmosphere are established across the first of three sections. In this text the narrator is a young adult, and her development is towards life energy and her own libidinal energy, which seem

to be the opposite of death. However, death returns in dreams, courtesy of the past's reach into the present, and culture's traditions that insist on a concept of gender that seeks to deny women their life (energy). Where Melina's relationship with Dinos initially seems to be one of pure life force and libidinal desire (48–9), his conservative gendered behaviour leads her to dream of him as dead, lying in a coffin (56). The deaths that cage her aunt and her aunt's friend Loula are those of their husbands, and Melina's Bildung is to learn the gendered place she is expected to fill, a place that will, as it has done for her female relations, bind her to the limited parameters of such subjectivity. To love people is to fear their deaths, however, and she has already described to the reader her pre-emptive dreams of her mother's death. In her long dream over the final pages of the story, Melina tries to save a frightened girl child who slips from her grasp, disintegrating into darkness (82–4). This last dream of *The Island* rehearses the gendered divisions that constitute Melina's Bildung as a female, and performs her resistance to the connection between death and melancholic mourning.

Summer Visit

The three stories in *Summer Visit* constitute a series that moves from the first story, 'Intimacy', redolent of a combination of *The Island* and 'The Boarding House', to 'Summer Visit' and 'Conversations with Mother'.

'Intimacy'

The dreams in 'Intimacy' are tied to the metaphorical deaths of relationships and the individuals who are suffocated by their gendered terms. In 'Intimacy', an iterative mixture of *The Island* and 'The Boarding House', the protagonist Helen is suffering from a 'paralysis' in her marriage to Philip. What began as the pleasure of desire and sexual experience has not realised its seeming promise of emotional intimacy, with Philip resisting

their non-physical closeness. Helen is captive in the isolating 'cage' (31) of conventional, unequal gender relations, in which 'Philip demanded all her attention' and '[h]er only role was of a permanent helper and a permanent listener' (32). Towards the end of the story Helen bumps into Michael, who was at university with her, and through whom she met Philip. Helen is 'excited to see him', and Michael's engagement with her reveals to Helen that she is mourning for the death of her earlier self:

> When he spoke he seemed to be speaking to another Helen, that she had forgotten, an unknown Helen full of movement and freedom, and she felt full of admiration and longing for this lost self that had been so carefree and clever. (40)

Thus a person from the past triggers a latent melancholy/mourning here for the lost self, a self associated with this man, Michael, rather than the one she married, Philip. Directly after this encounter with Michael begins the long dream sequence that spans one and a half pages and amid which the story ends. The dream is set in Greece, with images first from an interior, then a beach where 'they' are walking with a horse that begins to flounder in the wet sand. The narrator watches as a man tries to help the horse, propping it up. The wind and waves and rain are a swirling rush of white, towering over the humans in the scene. There is a repetition of the horse's physical struggles in the sand, when the man walking behind the narrator leans on her, gradually transferring all his weight – she is supporting him, and she hears a 'breaking sound' 'from deep inside him'. They get him on to a bench, with 'white substance' 'explod[ing] constantly around them', 'he was still alive, his eyelids were opening and closing … Someone was calling for a doctor' (41–2). At the most personal level, these are deaths of the soul and the bond between two people, as well as the death of the self observed by the self – identification by the ego with the lost love-object, the condition of melancholy.

Crucial to the representation of female subjectivity in 'Intimacy', the dream here is related to the story's Bildungsroman modality. Ending the story with a dream is crucial for the ways it enacts a re-centring of the female subject's ego in the world, a reassertion of her ego that has been slowly subsumed in the marriage, in which the male's career and needs are dominant. This story is perhaps the retrospective precursor to 'The Boarding House'.

'Summer Visit'

'Summer Visit' also deploys the dream space as the means by which the narrator can reassert her sense of self. There is only one dream in this story and it is both personal and public: the narrator dreams 'that they are going to guillotine me' (72). In this long story, death is ubiquitous in public and private life, and conceptions of and rituals around life and death in contemporary Greek culture are tied to its ancient roots. The presence of death here is of a generational nature as well, with elderly relatives, or the deaths of family members, made present as oral history.

In 'Summer Visit' death is present not only as an achieved state of the past but in its everywhere imminence in the present and the future, the sickness and illness that is part of living but that brings death into life as a permanent anxious prophecy of the future. Stelio, Captain Pavlou, the narrator's brother Nicholas – all are shadowed by death as they live with sickness. Illness as a precursor and herald of death is the preoccupation of the story – it brings death to the forefront of the thoughts of the living, those who are healthy as well as the sick; it infiltrates the lives of all. The weight of all these deaths threatens to erase the narrator's own sense of self, to displace her as the central consciousness of her own Bildungsroman. It is the dream-space that in this context allows her to reassert her sense of self.

The narrator's only dream in the story is introduced with the conscious thought of her own identity being subsumed by this cultural obsession with death. Ironically, however, it is a dream

about death that allows this female Bildungsroman to recentre the female narrator:

> I am tired, longing to escape from here and into my own life, I feel that I am living suspended unable to think. I have forgotten who I am. Last night I was dreaming that they were going to guillotine me.
>
> I was at the railway station, a feeling of great sadness in the air …
>
> Then I was in an apartment building, high up, children's voices could be heard from the inner courtyard. I was playing chess with Stelio, and in the middle of the game, they came. A very tall man, as if on stilts, dressed in a long black cloak. He was holding a plate, for my head I assumed, a dark brown plate, beautifully polished, made of coral.
>
> I said, 'Whatever you do, don't fuss around me. I want some space around me, some space.' The man nodded his head with great sadness … (72)

As with dreams of the earlier works, this dream presents the issue of death. But here, in a story that is largely about other people's deaths, the dream re-centres the story by insisting on the narrator's own ego. Although it takes place in both public and private domestic spaces, mirroring the spatialities of the story more broadly, this death is the narrator's own. Not at issue in the story itself, the narrator's own death becomes front focus in the dream, as the ego reasserts its primacy. The centrality of the ego is inherent in all dreams, but is crucially productive for those struggling to maintain some semblance of self when surrounded by the claims of others that they deserve primacy. In 'Summer Visit' this is compounded by the narrator's irrelevancy as an outsider, the lack of interest in her subjectivity by the culture in toto ('I am being introduced as the cousin from Australia, a classification of no interest to anyone' (85)). The final couple of pages of the whole 'Summer Visit' story return to the present,

to the narrator's departure from Athens, on a plane bound for Sydney, the end of the visit, and are a transition into the final story 'Conversations with Mother', in which dreams are central as a method for negotiating the significant death that opens the story: the death of the narrator's mother.

'Conversations with Mother' prefigurement and repetition

As with the dreams in the earlier prose works, the dreams in 'Conversations' prefigure a death – the death of the narrator's beloved mother – and then become a space in which this loss can be negotiated. The profundity of this death in relation to dreams is noted, also, by Sneja Gunew, who says: 'Even the dreams convey the absolute nature of the lost maternal presence. The first-person narrator has lost her primary interlocutor and existential reference point' (111). In this, perhaps, Kefala's Bildungsroman has come full-circle: like the late-stage dreams in her first novella, 'The First Journey', in which the narrator, Alexi, undergoes the psychic struggle to untangle mourning and melancholy after the death of his first love, all of the dreams in 'Conversations with Mother' are engaged in the psyche's attempts to process the death of the loved one.

In 'Conversations with Mother', dreams perform the work of the psyche in negotiating loss and attempting to integrate death into the perception of reality: both the specific death of the narrator's mother and the narrator's own impending death. At the end of the second page of the story the narrator explains her dream:

> The night you died I was dreaming that the house was coming down, the walls were falling, and then the books and the bookshelves came crumbling down from the ceiling with a great roar. Then the space cleared and a green park appeared. A still light over everything … (96–7)

The replacement of death and destruction with green beauty and light is a dream from before the narrator's knowledge of her mother's death. It is therefore a prefiguring summary of the forthcoming narrative, an encapsulating image of the drawn-out psychic processes of coming to terms with the death of her mother, a metaphor for destruction of self but replacement by a sense of ongoing life. The first steps of processing death are painful, though:

> Saturday night in Parramatta Road, the darkness of the night, the lights in the park, the terrible idea that you had disappeared for ever took my breath away …
>
> Dark dreams, waking up constantly, one night you were calling me in a stronger voice.
>
> Everything has changed since you died. (99)

The process here begins with momentary waking and comprehension of the magnitude of the loss that death has brought to the ego, followed by dreams in which the dead person lives in attempts to communicate with the dreamer. And then a reemphasis of the altered reality of the waking world that has been effected by the death of her mother. 'Everything has changed since you died'. But this process is not successful in changing the psyche or helping it adjust to life without the loved one, after only one 'realisation' of the new reality. 'Reality testing' (Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' 244) requires multiple repetitions of the same process of doubt about the death, followed by momentary affective comprehension of the loss, then adjusted understanding of reality as having changed. The narrator records a stream of moments, some in which the death of her mother is acknowledged by the traces in which she lives on through past actions: 'All the flowers you have planted have flowered and you nowhere. I come on the terrace and watch the garden, the birds, the light on the new green leaves, the slight wind, soft, that reminds me of your hands' (100).

Initially experiencing this new reality as unacceptable to the psyche, 'What a disappearance! What a total disappearance!' (100), the narrator's mother then returns in a dream, in which she has come back to life, and the narrator frantically asks her mother what food or drink she would like, trying to nourish her with this return to life.

> I kept asking, 'Will coffee do? Do you want some fetta?'
>
> You said yes, yes, but get moving, something like this. … I did not dare to believe that you were not dead … I kept thinking … what if you died again …
>
> Then I woke up. (102)

Dreams, then, force the dreamer to repeat the experience of loss.[12] The various stages in the process of mourning, of coming to terms with loss, can exist together, simultaneously. The narrator goes to the cemetery, an act that at least implies some level of recognition that death has occurred, and there talks to her mother: 'I was telling you about Meyerhold, whose biography I am reading' (103), and then tells us: 'I was telling Elizabeth over lunch: "No, no, I shall never accept this disappearance, whatever they say … everyone says … however inevitable … no … no …"' (103–4). This is an assertion that mimics Freud's definition of failure of the psyche to accept death, a failure of mourning, and a basis for the potential development of melancholy.

Freud's 'reality testing' (conducted by the psyche and supposed to show us that death has permanently altered reality, thereby paving the way for acceptance of death, enabling the proper process of mourning) is resisted by the narrator. This resistance is tied to the subject's psychic relationship to the inevitability of its own death. The narrator considers this in relation to Ancient Egyptian ruins:

> This persistent, overblown desire to make something that will outlast us, be eternal, live in time, extend us, this struggle against death …

> I was always so aware of how ephemeral we are, was telling you then, I was afraid that when I touched something it would disappear under my hand.
>
> Tired. I am very tired. Trying to survive day by day. Attacked by everything, people, photographs, the house, your room. (105)

The psyche's contradictory ideas are expressed across this section: the reality principle that the passing of long time erases all memories except those scratched onto the most sturdy of physical objects; the narrator's assertion that she has always been aware of this, despite being an artist partaking in this very activity of making things 'that will outlast us'; and then a shift in the metaphors so that it is the ephemerality of the rest of the world, not the narrator, that is at stake – the narrator's hand is not what she fears will disappear, only the things it touches. The latter reflects the ego's belief in its own immortality. But experiencing loss through the death of a loved one is a loss so profound that it 'attacks' the subject's ego, as she says here.

From this point onwards in 'Conversations with Mother', the narrator's own mortality becomes tied in material ways to those of her mother before her death, enacting an identification of the ego with the lost love-object. The body of the narrator mimics the illness of the dead one, in the psyche's identification, but dreams continue to display to the ego the loss that has occurred:

> I was all made of electricity and crackling everywhere, ready to flare up … go up in flames, in pain. And on and on like this throughout the night.
>
> Then I was dreaming of you. I was walking, searching in this desolate landscape at Botany, chimneys and the sun falling on the sea and the broken rocks. You were somewhere. I wanted to reach you, to tell you something. (108)

These bodily pains, this intimation of mortality, then, is followed by a dream of the dead loved one as truly absent, her

mother 'somewhere', but not reachable. Then almost immediately another dream:

> In the dream I was with you in this large, barn-like building. […] There was a camp bed, and on the bed your body, stiff. You were next to me, comforting me. I somehow could not get over the surprise that you were alive and yet your body was lying on the bed …
>
> …
>
> Your eyes were as if stones that were burning from inside, dark brown and very alive.
>
> Then I woke up.
>
> This is the first time I saw you and your body as two separate entities …
>
> Thinking of you now, how many things I did not understand. Ultimately everyone's range of understanding is limited. (111–12)

Self and (m)other are merged in the empathy of physical, bodily pain and illness, now that the narrator, too, is suffering the pains of age and identifying with the mother. The dream enacts this, and presents a mind-body split that would work to the advantage of the bereaved, allowing the dead to continue living with the materially alive. But then, the 'waking' reflection that 'ultimately everyone's range of understanding is limited' re-divides the self and the other, the living and the dead, recalling the limits of the body and the mind that contain the self in itself. Finally, yet another oscillation, the breakdown of those boundaries yet again:

> Everything I see, I hear, I remember, I touch, leads back to you, it does not matter how remote, how unconnected, how far, everything leads back.
>
> …

> We were both in the corridor opening the door, you were on my right, full of good will, helping me in my grief, trying to console me, your attitude terribly touching, silent. (113)

Like the eyes of dark stone that echo the dark eyes of the weeping child in the first dream of 'The Boarding House', the mother is here the dreamer's double, her self, supporting the dreamer in her mourning of the mother.

Then comes the final dream of 'Conversations with Mother', in which the dreamer represents the ambiguity of her psychic relationship to death: is it a relationship of mourning, or melancholy?

> Dream last night. I was in a totally white place, fog white. A small bridge over a river that could not be seen.
>
> I was on this side, arguing, pleading with you to come over. But you did not want to, you seemed quite pleased, laughing with a group of people, no faces, just the outlines, these strong white presences, their voices discussing in a friendly way among themselves. A touch of gold in the air; a transparent white all around and the voices.
>
> I alone on this side with a small suitcase. (116–17)

In this final dream the ego returns to an image of itself from a time when traumatic loss permanently altered reality from then on: here as the child abandoned in mid-journey, a migrant not at home, on the wrong side of the river. Waiting to get to the other side. This is an image and affective experience of both mourning and melancholy: an image that confesses the 'reality' of mourning – that the beloved is permanently dead and will not return – but also presents the ego as an abandoned, helpless 'lost' one, a child who cannot get to the adult side of the river.

But this nightmare does not end the story, as it does in 'Intimacy'. Rather, as in 'The Boarding House', *The Island* and 'The First Journey', a short paragraph about the natural environment and the seasonal weather follows this dream. In a

deliberately neutral tone, this description of the trees that ends 'Conversations', trees whose bark looks like human nipples (81), creates the sense of humans living on after, in a sense, the end of their lives as humans. This is an image of the libido and life drive overcoming the death drive.

Dreams in Kefala's prose works, then, are part of the characters' lives, prefiguring events of their futures and depicting their relationships to the past. Sometimes nightmarish, at other times laborious and even ecstatic, death is their common content and drive; dreams in these texts enable the processing of death as a central dilemma of life. Negotiating the two possible responses for the bereaved – mourning or melancholy – specific contextual and textual circumstances determine the protagonists' reactions. Despite the specificities of character, situation, stylistics and temporality, ultimately, for the female characters their dreams of death, even if they are sinister or sad, are profoundly enabling.

Notes

1 Ronald R. Thomas argues that: '[t]he "syntactic laws" as Freud called them, which characterize the dream work correspond to the features we have come to associate with the technical innovations of the Modernist novel' (259).

2 To highlight most fully the implications of this, I will read the novellas as one of two ongoing strands in Kefala's oeuvre, developed alongside the other strand of her poetry. The novellas form a body of concomitant meaning and testimony to the practice of being a female writer that both comments on and contextualises her work as a poet. Unpacking the relationship between these two strands is not within the scope of this essay, but would no doubt provide insightful readings.

3 In her book on the female Bildungsroman, Kleinbord Labovitz analyses the literature of Dorothy Richardson, Doris Lessing, Simone de Beauvoir and Christa Wolf, and concludes that: 'Similarities and a recurrent pattern appearing in each of the works [are] as follows: self-realization (including identity questions, self-discovery and self-knowledge); sex roles (including male/female roles and role models); education, dramatizing how the heroine reads; inner and outer directedness (psychological, sexual, ideological, societal); religious crisis, where applicable; career; attitude

toward marriage; philosophical questions (thoughts on life and death); and the heroine's personal quest which manifests itself as a social or spiritual quest' (8).

4 Indeed, this difficulty is addressed and explicated in relation to the representation of dreams in literature in Thomas' book. Thomas argues that, like Freud himself, literary novelists of the nineteenth century used dreams in their works to invite analysis into the 'true' workings of the world – a project in which their novels were more generally engaged. The Modernist writers, on the other hand, who were writing during and after Freud's career, were often hostile to his research, despite their own works often being demonstrable proof of Freud's theorisations of how dreams work. This is because, Thomas argues, Modernist writers often wrote texts as if they were dream narratives, as they sought to represent the surreal and often dream-like experience of the waking world itself.

5 As opposed to trying to 'decode' the 'manifest content' to reveal what Freud called the 'latent content', which in turn would reveal the 'dream wish' – this was the process of the analyst during psychoanalytic treatment (*Interpretation of Dreams* 210).

6 Borch-Jacobsen qualifies this by saying that the ego in the dream is not identical to itself, even where it appears as multiple versions of the 'I' of the dreamer: 'though it can even defract itself into several "part-egos", we still have to recognise that it is nowhere properly itself, given that it never avoids yielding to an identification and always confuses itself in some way with another (an alter ego, but one that is neither other nor self)' (21).

7 In an historical materialist sense, Freud's work was tied to war and the psychic traumas displayed by returned soldiers from World War I. The European context of Kefala's background and the World War II histories that prompted her own family's migration and the dislocation of millions from their original cultures brings her texts into conversation with these issues.

8 Freud says: 'The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that, with one exception, the same traits are met with in mourning. The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning; but otherwise the features are the same. Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does

not recall him – the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him' (*Mourning and Melancholia* 244).

9 For Freud on secondary revision ('secondary elaboration') see *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 289.

10 Condensation is discussed by Freud at length across *The Interpretation of Dreams*. See pp. 276–7 for one extended definition.

11 In this dream, her father and mother are 'walking with an unknown man' (101). The narrator calls to them, is initially ignored, but then her father turns around. His face is painted like a clown's, with a white mask, 'a vertical line across each eye. He was crying silently' (101). Her mother's body is 'transparent', she is wearing a 'long bridal dress' (101), and she floats away up into the sky, escaping the desperate cries of the narrator.

12 Freud developed his theory of 'repetition compulsion' in tandem with analysis of dreams of survivors of traumatic events, such as war, who dreamt repeatedly of the same traumatic scenarios. This evidence made him reconsider 'the pleasure principle', and he argued that, like the 'fort da' game played by the toddler to gain mastery over the trauma of its mother's leaving the room, repetition compulsion is a way for the psyche to gain control over traumatic events (Stonebridge 277).

Works cited

Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *The Freudian Subject*, translated by Catherine Porter, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991 (1988).

Brett, Judith. 'The Process of Becoming: Antigone Kefala's *The First Journey* and *The Island*'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 126–37.

Bronfen, Elizabeth. 'Freud's Book of Dreams'. *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature and Film*, translated by Elizabeth Bronfen and David Brenner, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 136–55.

Castle, Gregory. 'The Modernist Bildungsroman'. *A History of the Bildungsroman*, edited by Sarah Graham, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 143–73.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams 3rd Edition*, translated and introduced by A. A. Brill, London and New York, Macmillan, 1913 (1900), https://archive.org/details/interpretationof1913freu/page/n5, ebook accessed 16 May 2019.

—— 'Mourning and Melancholia (1917)'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916)*, edited and translated by James Strachey with Anna Freud, London, Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 243-58. www.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_MourningAndMelancholia.pdf, accessed 16 May 2019.

Gunew, Sneja. 'On *Summer Visit: Three Novellas* (Giramondo, 2002) in *Australian Feminist Studies* vol 18, no. 42, November 2003'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 109–12.

Hankins, Leslie Kathleen. 'Alas, Alack! or A Lass, a Lack? Quarrels of Gender and Genre in the Revisionist "Künstlerroman": Eudora Welty's "The Golden Apples"'. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1991, pp. 391-409.

Joannou, Maroula. 'The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century'. *A History of the Bildungsroman*, edited by Sarah Graham, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 200-16.

Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *The Island*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1993 (1984).

—— *Summer Visit*, Sydney, Giramondo Publishing, 2002.

Kleinbord Labovitz, Esther. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Peter Lang, 1986.

Nickas, Helen. 'Re-deeming the Past: Personal and Cultural Memory in the Work of Antigone Kefala'. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, edited by Vrasidas Karalis and Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013, pp. 188–98.

Stonebridge, Lyndsey. 'Psychoanalysis and Literature'. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, edited by Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 269–85.

Thomas, Ronald R. *Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1990.

7

Antigone Kefala: 'Clinical' View over a Shadowy Conscience/Consciousness

Michael Tsianikas

Conscience/consciousness

Of one thing we can be sure: it is impossible to perceive reality as it is, therefore it is impossible to represent it as it is or was. It is always too late. Between 'see' and 'saw', or 'say' and 'said', for example, there is a significant gap, a significant vacuum, where not only the perception is corrupted but, most importantly, in the case of literature, where the language corrupts itself. This essay will have a look into this vacuum-land, where Antigone Kefala is wandering as a 'dis-placed' individual.

The key words and concepts for me here are 'conscience' and 'consciousness', and the main focus of this essay will be on how conscience/consciousness constructs itself as perception, knowledge, awareness or wisdom – and how this process operates in Kefala's work. If we are following the Socratic path,

for example, then virtue is knowledge and wisdom, as all sins arise from ignorance and the happy person is the virtuous one. 'Socrates is "the mystagogue of science" in whose eye the lovely gleam of madness never glowed', writes Sue Prideaux in her recent book, *I Am Dynamite! A Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* (90). Nietzsche, following the philosophical and aesthetic split between the Apollonian and Dionysian spirit, has opted for an anti-Socratic position, basically promoting the creative and unpredicted inner forces of the will. His concerns were that an over-polished cultural attitude promotes intellectual laziness and ends up with a lethargic 'sympathy'. He writes: 'with our current veneration for the natural and the real, we have arrived at the opposite pole to all idealism, and have landed in the region of waxworks' (90).

Generally speaking, in the ancient Greek context, conscience as a word does not exist. What exists is the verb *suneidenai* (σύνοιδα, I know within myself), which appears in a variety of contexts. We might begin with the celebrated late sixth to early fifth-century BC poet Sappho, who made the poet's case to express lyrical passion and personal feelings. This will mark the dawn of something new – I feel, therefore I exist: 'Έγων δ' εμαυτόν τούτο σύνοιδα' (And this I feel in myself). But the meaning of the verb was overloaded with a quite dominant meaning within the Platonic framework under the constant examination not of feelings but of knowledge: what I know and how I can know that I know something. The Romans later adopted the word as *conscientia*. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'The term "conscience" translates the Latin "*conscientia*," which refers to sharing "knowledge" (*scientia*) "with" (*con*), and which in turns translates the equivalent Greek term "*suneidenai*"' (Giudilini n.p.). Then something else happened. During the first centuries of the development of the Christian dogma, while it seems that the word conscience (συνείδησις) continued to appear with the original meaning, very soon and in a quite dramatic way it was redirected towards ethical connotations. St Paul writing to the Corinthians, for example, urges them:

> ἀλλ' ἀπειπάμεθα τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς αἰσχύνης, μὴ περιπατοῦντες ἐν πανουργίᾳ μηδὲ δολοῦντες τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας συνιστῶντες ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.
>
> But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (*Η Αγία Γραφή*, B: 4.2)

This is how it could be interpreted what the genius philosophizing but yet un-philosopher St Paul claims: To appear in everybody's conscience under the *de facto* truth's self-manifestation in front of God. This powerful and rationally challenged statement will put an unbearable pressure on the concept of conscience, with ongoing consequences. Later (in the twelfth century), under the influence of a more rigid Christian dogma, the meaning of the word will be only ethically oriented towards the faculty of knowing what is right, the awareness that the acts for which one feels responsible do or do not conform to one's ideal of right. And later (in the late fourteenth century) more generally, 'sense of fairness or justice, moral sense'. I believe that in order to revoke something of the original meaning of conscience, which was probably missing for a few centuries, degraded (and 'corrupted') by the Christian influence (as happened with other words, like 'dogma' or 'demon' for example), it was about time to create the word 'conscious-ness'. It appears that since the 1630s, this word expresses 'internal knowledge', 'the state of being aware of what passes in one's own mind', and since 1744, 'the state of being aware of anything'. Under a new philosophical leadership (Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, the Cambridge Platonists, etc.) during the long journey of the Enlightenment (*L'âge de raison*) and the challenge to the Church's authority, conscience/consciousness began a new journey to explore the boundaries of

human knowledge, based as much as possible on rational thinking and not on unchecked religious dogmatisms: 'Only after the Seventeenth Century did "consciousness" start to be used with a distinct meaning reflecting to the psychological and phenomenal dimension of the mind, rather than to its moral dimension' (Jorgensen n.p.). The idea of 'freedom of conscience' was one of the first articles declared in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and still today there are so many debates about what 'freedom' and 'conscience' are exactly. All of these discussions immediately affect most aspects of human interaction by creating new ways of thinking/reconstructing/deconstructing the notion of conscience/consciousness through language. For example, the concept 'consciousness-raising' is attested from 1968; the word 'συνειδητοποιώ', in Modern Greek, means 'the process of making, constructing the conscience' (a direct translation from the French '*prendre conscience*', meaning realise but literally take, get, hold, seize conscience).

I could continue to discuss the endless meanings and connotations around the words conscience/consciousness, but this is not the purpose of my essay. This introduction is just to make us aware that the way we are trying to deal with the question of knowledge or awareness about the outside world and ourselves is quite complicated and has changed markedly across the history of the word in Western culture. I believe that if literature (or other arts for that matter) exists, it is precisely in the attempt to deal with the complexities of knowledge and how this knowledge is constructed through the human conscience/consciousness, in particular through the work of the most shadowy sides of spoken and/or unspoken languages. Different authors have dealt differently with the above. I believe that Antigone Kefala's work systematically explores the ways in which conscience (with its original connotations) and/or consciousness (in its multifunctional post-Descartes sense) arises out of the deepest experiences of human existence.

Empirical experiences are more than important for humans to construct their consciousness. These experiences are the 'blocks' with which the meaning of life as a whole can be built. For Antigone Kefala, these empirical experiences are mercilessly re-examined linguistically, in particular when language re-examines itself, like a snake biting its own tail: clinically, methodically, pragmatically, by not interlocking words but intertwining them. This is why in Kefala's writings there is always a 'disloyalty' towards the conventional understanding of space, time, memory, matter etc. She turns pre-established ideas, language and concepts inwards or against themselves, adding another linguistic, psychological or phenomenal dimension where 'new' things are taking shape or materialising: making something by undoing it. Nietzsche said: 'Nothing is more difficult for man than to apprehend a thing personally: I mean to see it as a thing, *not as a person* … We have only to spy on ourselves at that moment when we hear or discover a proportion new to us' (30–1).

A passage from Kefala's first published fiction, 'The First Journey' (1975), shows the process of remaking experience in a dream in which the 'I' spies on itself:

> Outside the boulevard stretched in the afternoon light. I felt as if a great weight had been lifted and that somehow belonged to the place too, in a small way … A solidity of matter in which all seemed to move, that carried them giving them an inner confidence that was unshakable. In the dream, that night, I was going up a spiral staircase in an empty white house. I was with someone else. I and another I. Sometimes I was I, and sometimes the other person. So we were going up together. (15–16)

Antigone versus Kefala

Following the argument of an actively thinking (or, even better, passively dreaming) being as 'I' and simultaneously as 'another

person', we could imagine Antigone conversing / arguing / ironically undermining Kefala and vice versa. This will allow us first of all to deal with and reject common perceptions, for instance based on her biography. What we commonly read is: Kefala was born in Romania of Greek parents. She grew up middle class; surrounded by classical music, French literature and so on, before migrating to Greece, then to New Zealand and finally settling in Australia. Most of the time, the perception of her work was contaminated by those *faits divers*. I believe that this information about a life is there not to be interpreted simplistically by us, but rather re-examined apophatically. The method is negative: *what it is not*. Kefala displays to us the method through the persistent and methodical 'No' which transcends her conscience as a writer; her mode is the reverse of assertion – she withdraws, averts, renounces. This is probably the explanation for why she is so laconic. Kefala explains in an interview: 'My approach to English is not quite an English approach. The type of imagery that I use, the kind of vocabulary that I use, the whole texture of my language is not English texture' (Karalis and Nickas 186). She writes in *Sydney Journals*, 'In a biography of Giacometti: ''He felt that in this world there can be no final view of things. Disavowing all possibilities he undertook each work as a fresh assault on the impossible' (7). And:

> My themes are Greek, but one does not actually write as 'something,' but rather as an individual who has certain concerns and preoccupations. One does not think of nationality. If you do it consciously, it will probably not work. (Nickas 255).

Kefala notes in her *Journals*:

> Some of Erik Satie's sayings: 'those who practice an art must live in a state of complete renunciation.'
> On his deathbed to a young musician: 'One must remain intransigent up to the end.' (245)

Kefala performs this 'practice', 'renunciation' and 'intransigence' throughout her work.

This is why, I believe, all her biographical framework is there (repeated by everybody: in my opinion Antigone is the classical victim of her biography) perhaps easily to fix a convenient perception – and in particular the famous one concerning 'multiculturalism' – and avoid her ongoing 'renunciations'. Should we then totally avoid her biography? No, it is impossible to escape from this, but I think that we could process all this information as a metaphor or allegory. Of something like a 'boarding house', where a strange life evolves; a 'lost' character goes from one strange room to the next, questioning everything and undoing everything all the time – a 'refugee' in a 'boarding house' of languages, in fact. Concepts or words associated with 'constructed or built edifices' are almost a fixation to which Kefala refers so many times. She writes in *Alexia*, for example, that language is a 'magnificent and huge edifice built by the continuous affords of successive generations'. In 'The Boarding House', she writes:

> I am alone. The room is small and dusty. Obscure medicine bottles, half-empty, fill the cupboards, that have remained closed for years, like the room, untouched, used only for tonight's performance … The high walls of the corridor are painted grey, in a corner a few white uniforms are hanging and from inside a smell of iodoform and frozen air. I wait on my chair in silence. The madness of reality. (*The First Journey* 57)

Facing the 'madness of reality' in a 'boarding house' of languages and being consumed by the passion to construct even 'one sentence' to assert 'I am', Kefala writes:

> Trying to write, one needs so much confidence. In oneself to carry even a sentence. The moment the level goes down one realizes the futility of all things, the thin nature of the enterprise and language that refuses to work. (*Sydney Journals* 9)

Regarding *Alexia*, I have tried to analyse how language works in an article entitled '*Alexia*: Antigone Kefala's Overdue Fairytale', and I don't want to repeat myself here. What I would only like to add now is a quote by Antigone herself, from her latest book, *Max: The Confessions of a Cat*. In this case, instead of a human being, a cat (a 'cynic' cat, I could add: dog like; 'kyon', meaning dog in ancient Greek) is observing and clinically analysing human beings, using and questioning the limits of human language. 'A philosophizing cat observing the humans around him.' Cat states: 'We must all take to writing, this is the only way. Tell our stories … do our analysis, present our CATS' point of view.' And:

> Everyone is in a hurry to tell, opinions everywhere. But opinions of what? Language after all has its limits, especially in the way it is used now. As in Music, Language must resonate against Silence. And the quality of Silence has been, alas, in decline for some time. Maybe the Silence of Cats is adding a more valuable dimension to our understanding. (54–5)

'Language must resonate against Silence': this line alone can describe Antigone's endeavour to perhaps overcome herself as Kefala and become possibly a Silent Antigone or a Silent Cat or both. According to Kefala, it seems that this is the only way to bring back something of the first sounds of an old and possibly forgotten language; something that Jean Paul Sartre might call 'Being and Nothingness'. This method is not different from that of the one who opens the first crevices of our established ego to have a look into the fascinating landscapes of Silent or Cat-like conscience.

The 'boarding' island

The Island was published first in 1984, then in 1993, and finally in a trilingual edition (English, French, Greek) in 2002. The three-part story is about a teenage girl growing up in what

might be called a 'boarding island'. The three parts of the book could be read as a summary of a life: the first stage of a life (including theories about the beginning of human life on the island); the second stage, growing up and challenged by emotions and absurdly falling in love; and finally, the third stage, settling into something like a maturity by overcoming the troubles of emotions and looking forward into the future. What kind of future? This future is about looking into a vast open vacuum and enigmatic unknown and, perhaps, facing again and again the 'madness of reality' and again the 'silence'. The end of part three – the end of the novella – reads:

> And near the creek, petrified in the morning silence, the tree spread its branches, dry and cracked like frozen fingers. There it stood, vulnerable and young, glass tears hanging from its arms, each breaking in the light as if a crystal, filling the air with a white resonance. (180)

We can visualise this tree as the tree of life: silence, fragility, resonances in the air and against the silence, in this 'empty' Island, which I have described elsewhere as 'the endless nothingness' (Tsianikas 177). For the narrator this is a revelation in the morning garden, after a long night of strange dreams. Dreams are an integral part of Kefala's narratives and are always dealing with the most important elements, from which the making of a semi-conscience arises about space, time, events and experiences, always coming out of and going back into a great vacuum:

> Yet the nights were full of dark, agitated dreams. The night before I was dreaming that I was at home, I had been walking for days searching for something, and I was tired and thirsty. … I was walking alone … My steps sounded hollow and dry on the pavement … Someone was following me. The air stirred behind me and the steps could be heard clearly eating the air in large gulps. (*The Island* 124)

Kefala, so laconic, is so generous when she describes dreams. She is not the only one. An outstanding example is Marcel Proust and his major work, *A la Research du Temps Perdu*: everything emerges from the semi-conscience/consciousness, between being awake / falling asleep. Of course I should also mention here the 'clinical' Freud, from where, partially at least, the title of this essay derives.

But I want to focus on the notion of the unknown 'island', so important in Kefala's literary journey. The idea of an unknown island (which could be called Literature) brings to our mind so many other (literary or not) islands, which are always raising the critical question about the relationship between conscience/consciousness and knowledge of ourselves and our connection with a foggy reality. The figure of the island is ubiquitous. In 2012, anthropologist Charles Stewart published a very interesting book, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, in which fictionalised realities, dreaming obsessions and historical consciences are interconnected in an intriguing and fascinating manner:

> Charles Stewart tells the story of the inhabitants of Kóronos, on the Greek island of Naxos, who, in the 1830s, began experiencing dreams in which the Virgin Mary instructed them to search for buried Christian icons nearby and build a church to house the ones they found. Miraculously, they dug and found several icons and human remains, and at night the ancient owners of them would speak to them in dreams. The inhabitants built the church and in the years since have experienced further waves of dreams and startling prophesies that shaped their understanding of the past and future and often put them at odds with state authorities. Today, Kóronos is the site of one of the largest annual pilgrimages in the Mediterranean. (University of Chicago Press n.p.)

We can also go back and reflect on the Platonic mythical (or real?) island of Atlantis, from *Timaeus*; or go to Thomas More's *Utopia*, or to many other works. We could search online and find that an artist named Clear Conscience (the name itself so apposite to this essay) has composed a very interesting song: 'When the night closes and you are left with no one / Me call it island feeling cause me left all alone'. And, closer to our island, Australia, is the ongoing matter of refugee detention on islands close by. In a 2019 review, Bec Kavanagh writes: 'The body becomes an island in Peggy Frew's third novel, one submerged beneath the weight of grief and unhappiness' (20). Kavanagh opens her review by quoting the beginning of Frew's novel, about what we think we know: 'You were a girl, a sister and a daughter, and we knew you. At least we thought we did'. Of course, *The Odyssey* is inconceivable without Ithaca, which is the opposite of the biblical 'promised land'. Finally, I would like to mention *Les Îles* (The Islands) of Jean Grenier; published in 1959, it had a significant impact on French literature, and Albert Camus expressed the decisive influence of this book on him becoming an author. For him (and his generation), he wrote, *Les Îsles* represented something important: the need to 'negotiate the invisible'.

> So, people from the North escape to the Mediterranean coast lines or into the desert's lights. But, where are the people of the light escaping, if not into the invisible? … a wonder from island to island … The animal enjoys and dies, a human being marvels and dies, where is the port? (Camus 11. My translation.)

Camus' point is echoed in the first page of Grenier's *Les Îles*:

> In every life, and in particular at its dawn, there is a moment that decides about everything. … This is what exactly happened to me: my first recollection is one of confusion, a diffuse dream extending over the years. There was no need to talk to

> me about the *vanity* of the world: I have felt better than that: *le vacuum*. (23–4)

Elizabeth McMahon writes enlighteningly in *Islands, Identity and the Literary Imagination* about Australia and its 'geographical facts' (Island-Continent, Upside-down / Inside out status), something that applies directly to Kefala's 'Island' of New Zealand:

> These statements of geographical 'facts' and legend are also inherently literary: the juxtaposition of opposites is an *oxymoron*; it is also a *paradox* in that it requires the interconnection of opposing terms for its effect and these qualities are underscored by the syntactical repetition of the *isocolon* (a statement that repeats the same phrase structure). Further, the reflexivity of these two sets of binaries casts the construction as a *chiasmus*, for there is an inverted parallelism in the two statements of topography. In summary, this perception of Australia is of a space that interconnects geographical and rhetorical contradiction and inversion, a space that contains an otherness within itself. Such a space promises to be endlessly baffling and, hence, philosophical and creative. (3)

Kefala's works are constantly dealing with these 'facts' and in particular the cartography of 'vacuum', which could bring us back to the apophatic 'no' discussed earlier in this essay. Just think about the titles of Kefala's work: *Absence*, *Thirsty Weather*, *The Alien*, *The Island* and so on. And this is exactly a 'vacuum', where conscience/consciousness constructs and dismantles itself in an ongoing way, in particular if it aims to avoid stereotypes and preconceived ideas. Manfred Jurgensen writes: 'It is symptomatic that Antigone Kefala writes about "the island," not about New Zealand. For this is the prose of a poet, not the autobiographical document of a frustrated migrant' (88). Vacuum and emptiness are populating Kefala's work, like the ghosts our raw conscience, the apophatic: not 'who am I?' but 'who am I *not*?' She writes:

'I went to the cemetery yesterday. The place milky white and empty, the sea away' (*Sydney Journals* 5). And: 'touching almost the edge of the empty dark hollowness' (*The Island* 2002, 274), and so on.

In my opinion we are committing a fundamental error if we read Kefala's work simply from the point of view of 'multiculturalism' and/or migration. It is so convenient and opportunistic. This maybe could explain why a major work of Australian literature like *The Island* remains a marginal and almost unknown work, ignored by mainstream and in particular younger readers. I would like to see *The Island* being included in all sorts of teaching curricula. On the back page of the first and second editions of *The Island* (1984 and 1993) we read: '*The Island* is a story of a young woman living between two cultures … [who] falls in love for the first time. Her naivety and inexperience heighten momentarily a relationship which finally cannot be sustained.' First comment: 'Two cultures' – why only two, not three or four (is there anybody living within only one culture, anyway? And if so, what kind of person are they?). Second comment: 'naivety and inexperience' – being in love? Is there any case where, being troubled by the most irrational thing (after possibly death) – eros – you can be 'experienced', even if you are a hundred years old? In the 2002 edition we read, amongst other things: 'A trilingual book celebrating the true spirit of multiculturalism … it is language with its complex intercultural workings that is emphasized by this trilingual publication' (n.p.). First comment: celebrating the spirit of multiculturalism is just a 'managing' cliché. Second comment: 'intercultural workings' of the language could be closer to Antigone's work by saying not just 'intercultural' but rather 'inter-semantic working of the language'.

Between *cum (con)* and science

In *The Island*, Kefala writes:

> Was I the only one aware of the immutable laws that physical gestures carried their fate too, imposed on you by a careless abuse, a reality that was not your own and that finally you could not escape. This fatality inherent in our gestures no one took any notice of. (2002, 122)

This amazing paragraph about the 'inherent fatality of our gestures' (Aristotle could possibly talk about unthinking thought) can testify to Kefala's acute work to unveil split moments before conscience is made out of predetermined and unconscious elements, gestures, thoughts, feelings and use of language sounds. This split moment affects dramatically the relationship with the self, which, again, continues to remain deeply split. She writes: 'I felt so unfamiliar, as if my old, plain self had suddenly been replaced by a very daring, sensual version that excited me with its foreignness'. 'Old plain self' and 'daring', new, 'foreign' self? These are dramatic moments of a fragmented conscience, realising the concurrent forces and the neurotic obsession to know myself.

It is time to revisit here the etymology of the word 'science': 'to separate one thing from another, to distinguish', related to *scindere* 'to cut and divide', 'to cut, split' (the source also of the Greek word *skhizein*: 'to split, rend, cleave'). If science is already a splitting force, we could imagine what it could be by adding the Latin prefix *cum*: con-science. What emerges from this? Between *cum* (*con*) and *science* emerge strong forces, vacuums, empty spaces and the sounds of the language 'resounding against the silence' (as Kefala put it); sounds as if a woodman is splitting wood in a deep, mysterious forest and then 'eerie silence'. In *Alexia* we read: 'The eerie silence was like the one she remembered after the sirens had stopped and before the planes arrived' (66). This is literally Kefala's space. She writes in *The Island*:

> I watched them all, strangely disconnected, too preoccupied inwardly … I wanted them away, an empty space around me in which I could repeat to myself the entire story from the beginning, starting from the dance, stretching the first part so that I could feel again the surprise of the first words. I could not remember them exactly, but repeated them over and over again, in an effort to absorb them, to make them part of me, to convince myself. (2002, 112–14)

Conclusion: Grammateion/grammenon

Aristotle, dealing with the question of thinking and writing, said in his masterpiece *On the Soul*: 'What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing-table (*grammateion*) on which as yet nothing actually stands written (*grammenon*): this is exactly what happens with thought (Aristotle 3.4.430a1). In the case of literature this could be embodied, for example, as an image of the diving and emerging figure of the father:

> And I remembered going with Father, when I was small, in summer, to the beach on the other side of the city, crossing the Danube by boat with a boatman rowing. The empty stretch of sand, golden white in the strong summer sun, and at the back of it a forest of willow trees, the river alive with sparkling explosions of light. Then Father dived in and was gone. I watched for what seemed an interminable time for him to surface, but he was not coming up. I became more and more alarmed, frightened, then a total panic took hold of me as I watched this golden surface of the river, the strong light on it flowing too. I had started to cry when Father emerged, surprised … (Kefala, *Sydney Journals* 160)

We couldn't find a more descriptive passage than this one, where Kefala, in a quite Freudian way, reveals how the conscience/consciousness works in a child's imagination: emptiness,

explosions of light, the big stream of the Danube's water and the father diving (dead!) and emerging (alive!) in front of Antigone's agonising mind. We can claim with certainty that this experience reveals the traces of Antigone's (un)conscious formation/determination to become an author: 'author (n.) mid-14c, *auctor, autour, autor* "father, creator" … from Old French *auctor, acteor* "author, originator, creator, instigator" … and directly from Latin *auctor* "promoter, producer, father, progenitor"' (www.etymonline.com/word/author).

With this in mind, it is impossible now to avoid the temptation to further reflect on Antigone's Greek name and conclude: Αντι-γόνη, meaning the daughter who stands against the father.

Works cited

Η Αγία Γραφή (The Bible). Αδελφότης Θεολόγων Η «ΖΩΗ», Αθήνα, 1986.

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.

Camus, Albert. 'Préface'. Jean Grenier, *Les Îles*, Paris, Gallimard, L'Imaginaire, 1959.

Giudilini, Alberto. 'Conscience', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conscience/.

Grenier, Jean. *Les Îles,* Paris, Gallimard, L'Imaginaire, 1959.

Jorgensen, Larry M. 'Seventeenth-century theories of consciousness', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/consciousness-17th/.

Jurgensen, Manfred. '*The Island*', *Outrider*, vol. 1, no. 2, December 1984. Reprinted in Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 87–8.

Karalis, Vrasidas and Helen Nickas, editors. *Antigone Kefala. A Writer's Journey*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2013.

Kavanagh, Bec. 'Peggy Frew, *Islands*'. *The Australian*, 9–10 March, 2019, p. 20.

Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *The Island*. Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1984 (1993).

—— *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing (English-Greek edition), 1995.

—— *The Island, L'Île, Το Νησί*, introduction by Helen Nickas, translation by Marie Gaulis, Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2002.

—— *Sydney Journals: Reflections 1970-2000*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.

—— *Max: The Confessions of a Cat*, with a translation into Greek by Helen Nickas, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 2009.

McMahon, Elizabeth. *Islands, Identity and the Literary Imagination*, London, Anthem, 2016.

More, Thomas. *Utopia*, London, Penguin, 2012 (1551).

Nickas, Helen. *Migrant Daughters. The Female Voice in Greek-Australian Prose Fiction*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 1992.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Nietzsche Reader*, selected and translated with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale, London, Penguin, 1977.

Prideaux, Sue. *I Am Dynamite! A Life of Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York, Tim Duggan Books, 2018.

Tsianikas, Michael, '*Alexia*: Antigone Kafala's Overdue Fairytale'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 171–87.

University of Chicago Press. *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/D/bo25019114.html accessed 3 May 2021.

8

‘Before whom shall the drama be enacted?’

Anna Couani

This essay draws on material from a preface I wrote for Antigone Kefala’s latest book, *Journeys*, from Helen Nickas’ Owl Publishing in 2019. It canvasses the Sydney context that Antigone found herself in from the 1960s onwards, to the extent that I’ve shared that context with her as a literary colleague and friend of nearly forty years.

Firstly, I’d like to suggest a visualisation to you. Imagine an Australian who had learnt, say, French in school, going to France in their twenties and becoming a well-known writer there. Almost unimaginable. But that is the achievement of Antigone Kefala in the anglophone Australian context (also of Dimitris Tsaloumas, of whom more later); it is testament to her polyglot learning and intellectual sophistication, moving as she has done between the four languages of Romanian, French, Greek and English.

I've taken the title of this paper from an oft-quoted Kefala poem 'Coming Home' (*Absence* 104) because it speaks of the context we write in and the audience we write for, as well as the literary milieu we find ourselves in. Of course, it has another personal reference: of being a migrant living in a place where much of one's previous life is invisible and unknown. But it also suggests the fear we all have that when our parents die, when the people who know who we are, are no longer around, who will there be to understand our lives as a whole? Who will see the overall meaning and sense of it all? For Antigone, her initial audience was her very supportive mother, and this was the first step to moving her writing from a bottom drawer and into the public arena.

As a young woman, Antigone arrived in Sydney for the first time around 1959–60 and lived in a flat above a shop in Crown Street, Surry Hills, in inner-city Sydney and opposite the house where I lived as a teenager, above my parents' medical practice. Surry Hills was teeming with migrant workers, mostly Greek and Italian men living in residentials – what would be called guest houses today. My Greek-speaking father was ministering to the Greek community in the area, and our extended Greek-Australian family, being Kastellorizians and mostly Australian-born, lived around the Kingsford area. The linguist Dorothy Economou,[1] then a young student, lived a couple of doors down from Antigone's place above her parents' dry-cleaning business and often walked to school with me.

Around 1988, I wrote about our section of Surry Hills in the 1960s in *The Harbour Breathes*:

> A view of a section of the park at the end of the street by the school. I loved to hang around outside our house. I wanted to walk around more often than I had time. Up to the library, into town, back from town, down to the pool, up to the park, down the street to shop, to the corner shop. Or at night, to run fast from our front door straight across the road and in through the door of the shop directly opposite. I wove a life

> in and out of the streets, around the people, the buses and cars. I thought one day I could write about the street life. From the desk in my room on the third floor I watched the street at night. I wrote a poem about lying in the long grass under my grandmother's washing line. My grandmother's sheets were white patches against the sky. American abstract art arrived at the art gallery. There were English naturalist novels in the library, they were boring and depressing: a young English man is walking around a large English town in an overcoat thinking about women. On my street there were men everywhere from all over the world. Spain, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, Fiji. Coming out of the residentials, gathering on the street, leaning against the front fences. I just happened to be there. It was self-conscious experience as it was happening. I thought I was there to remember, to notice. But to remember what? The things which occur to me now. Or which occurred to me then. The swinging saloon doors on the wine bar where people fell in and fell out? The drycleaner's shop which smelt of steam? (n.p.)

Antigone and I must have crossed paths many times in Surry Hills but never met. However, I did meet and know the writer Yota Krili[2] in the 1960s in Surry Hills. She was a young woman at the time, a migrant from Arcadia, married to the poet Denis Kevans and a member of the Greek Atlas Club like my parents. Yota worked in the pharmacy on the corner near our house and lived in Surry Hills. Denis Kevans was the first person to make encouraging comments to me about the idea of becoming a poet. Yota did not meet Antigone at that time, but from the 1970s, Yota and I lived in the inner-city suburb of Glebe. Antigone had lived in nearby Annandale since about 1960. Then, from the 1980s onwards, we all connected and became friends, and continue to meet up regularly. It is Yota who has connected both Antigone and I to the Greek community at large over the last thirty years, having strong connections as a community language activist and ESL teacher. Yota wrote textbooks for Demotic Greek courses

for the Department of Education during the late 1970s and 1980s. She has written and published a substantial amount of her own poetry and, since her retirement as a teacher, has been writing a series of historical novels in Greek set in the Arcadian context – now numbering three and still going. She has published them in Australia through her own Pteroti House publishing, and they've also been published in Greece.

In the early 1960s, Antigone discovered with excitement and relief the aspect of Sydney life that was urbane, artistic and cosmopolitan, reminding her of Romanian urban culture. As a teenager, a few years later, together with the European Jewish friends I was studying architecture with at Sydney University, we discovered the same places. In addition to the Greek and Italian delis and restaurants, Northern Europeans started up their own food suppliers and coffee shops. There was Lorenzini's wine bar first in Elizabeth Street and then in William Street and many European-style coffee shops in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst. Rowe Street in the CBD included Carl Plate's Notanda Gallery, stocking prints of modern European art, and around the corner in Pitt Street, Jim Thorburn's Pocket Bookshop held contemporary American and English poetry. Art galleries sprang up in Paddington like the Rudy Komon Gallery and Gallery A that showed contemporary modern Australian art. Watters Gallery appeared in Darlinghurst. For Antigone, working at the Australia Council through the 1970s and coming into contact with a multitude of Australian artists, writers and musicians greatly enhanced her access to the artistic world of Sydney.

Antigone was introduced to her engineer husband at the Kings Cross home of the Dascalu family, who were Romanian Jewish refugees and whose son I was friends with in our architecture course. The Dascalu family of four lived in a tiny one-bedroom flat in one of the Art Deco blocks of flats in Macleay Street.

My first actual meeting with Antigone was in the early 1980s at the live poetry venue New Partz[3] in Newtown, where I was organising readings for the Sydney Poets Union, and Antigone

was in the audience. Antigone was then the Multicultural Arts Officer at the Australia Council. We got talking and immediately hit it off. There was a familiarity from our shared experience of the Sydney artistic world, Greekness and Surry Hills. I was involved in the Poets Union, in the No Regrets women writers group and, by day, teaching art to migrants in Intensive English Centres in Western Sydney. The acceptance of each other as writers was already a foregone conclusion; our connection was one of what we might have called 'multicultural activism' in those days. Today I would say it included anti-racism. Those kind of ideas, related through thousands of examples in our lives in Sydney and Australia, always informed our conversations. As did a common interest in feminism and similarly anti-sexism or anti-patriarchy. I need to note here that my position is more overtly political than Antigone's but we had in common that we were both working with migrants and aware of the social justice issues in the literary field as well. But Antigone knowingly connected me with Sneja Gunew and Efi Hatzimanolis and I felt that the four of us were a special force for a while. Antigone at the Australia Council, Sneja at Deakin University, Efi at Wollongong University and me, an officer in the Sydney Poets Union. In 1988, Sneja and I co-edited an anthology called *Telling Ways: Australian Women's Experimental Writing* and in 1996, Efi and Sneja were both involved in *Xtext*, a short-run magazine that sought to publish non-Anglo, Indigenous, queer women writers and artists.[4]

In the late 1970s, the Poets Union introduced a clause into its constitution that the Union should positively discriminate in favour of women and non-Anglo writers. So our readings had a kind of quota system, trying to ensure 50 per cent female representation. Our record of inclusion of non-Anglo and Indigenous writers was patchier, simply because we didn't find them. The No Regrets women writers workshop was formed in 1977 on the suggestion of Susan Hampton, when we realised that women writers were not turning up to Poets Union meetings

and the only women participating were connected to the core of men who founded the Sydney branch of the Union. Over the period 1978–90 that I was in the No Regrets group, many women who are well-known today, like Joanne Burns, Pam Brown, Dorothy Johnson, Inez Baranay, Moya Costello, Barbara Brooks and Mary Fallon, passed through the group followed by younger writers like Jane Skelton, Virginia Shepherd and Sarah St Vincent Welch.

In the 1990s another non-Anglo women writers group was formed by Sue Kucharova when No Regrets folded. People like Paula Abood and Alyssa Gazal were in that group. I mention these details to highlight the almost complete dominance of the literary scene in those days by Anglo-Celtic men and the need to form alternative groups where we wouldn't feel marginalised or patronised. Our activities were virtually underground. Most of the Sydney literary scene was loosely organised around male-dominated coteries. Naturally, any book reviews that occurred, if you were lucky enough to be published, were written by Anglo-Celtic men in publications run by Anglo-Celtic men.

Given these circumstances, it's quite amazing that Antigone's work was published during the 1970s and 1980s and was also reviewed, albeit in an often-misunderstood manner. It was to their credit that Wild and Woolley, run by two migrants, American-Australian Pat Woolley and English-Australian Michael Wilding, published Antigone. Apart from the fact that Antigone's work is fabulous and they were interested in new prose fiction, I maintain that this may have occurred partly because of the growing interest in writing from different voices outside the mainstream, but also because, being migrants, they weren't exactly bound to established literary groups and had the freedom to make new connections.

Most women writers, especially poets, were struggling to reach an audience. In the No Regrets group, we realised that the first step to achieving publication was to find a receptive and supportive live workshop audience. In the Poets Union, we saw that public

readings were another step towards becoming a writer in public. This kind of publication was one the Union was able to provide. This was done in a wider environment where it was very difficult to get published, where all kinds of exclusionary standards existed. Then as today, getting the imprimatur of established gatekeepers was and is essential to getting published. In addition, without a real audience, the tenor of women's writing, the construction of the writer/reader relationship was constrained and might be confined to the personal and confessional, not in a good way.

Antigone Kefala, being of the prewar generation, thirteen years older than me, was already operating in more informal artist/writer groupings that she and her friends had created. As is obvious in *Sydney Journals*, Antigone has always been very aware of a writer's need for and the value of an immediate and supportive audience. She has spent her life in Sydney surrounded by people like poet Rudi Krausmann and designer Lorraine Krausmann, who produced *Aspect* magazine together; painter and poet Franco Paisio; artists and poets Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius; academics Vivian and Alex Kondos; writer Jim Provencher; and music entrepreneur James Murdoch, amongst many others. One feature of this group, though, is that they were all born before World War II.

In the 1970s, I was involved with the small press literary magazine *Magic Sam* with my then partner, poet Ken Bolton. Through small-press circles, we connected with the Krausmanns and their publication, and there were similarities between our magazines because both included both literary and visual art. And both publications were avowedly modern with a small 'm', and would probably be called postmodern today. My partnership with Ken Bolton ended in 1978 over ideological differences to do with feminism and inclusiveness. I thought the magazine should be more open to women writers and non-Anglos. There was also a level of hysteria about feminism amongst the male writers we associated with, and this affected my relationship with Ken.

Sometime in the 1980s, after I'd got to know Antigone, she started inviting me to join her group gatherings; they were very

supportive of my work and were more open to experimental writing than many of my Australian-born peers. They understood Modernism, and I discovered that they, like Antigone, had a similar background of reading to me. They had read, as well as English literature, the French and Russian novelists that I'd read and lots of European poets, and they were plugged into European Modernist traditions, unfazed by collage and disrupted text and able to cope with dissolved boundaries between poetry and prose. They were all close to Modernist/Postmodernist visual art. To give some examples, Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius were connected to the Fluxus group through fellow Lithuanian émigré artist George Maciunas; Rudi Krausmann was connected to the various contemporary German writers and published them, visited them in Germany, and hosted some in Australia.

One of the most inclusive poetry anthologies produced over the last thirty years is a bilingual English-German publication that Rudi Krausmann co-edited with Gisela Triesch in 1994 called *Made in Australia*, a twentieth-century collection that included many non-Anglo Australians, Indigenous writers and women writers. This collection cut across the literary coteries and the Left/Right divisions in the literary scene.

In the 1960s, Jurgis Janavicius was the first person to publish poets John Tranter and Robert Adamson in his small-press publication *Poetry & Prose Broadsheet*.[5] But despite their efforts towards Anglo-Australians, neither Jurgis nor Rudi were ever fully accepted in Australian literary circles by Anglo-Australian men. I doubt if Anglo-Australian editors readily accepted their work for publication, certainly not as readily as that of American migrant poet Phillip Hammial or English migrant poet Martin Langford.

There are a number of conundrums in the various groups I've found myself participating in that are relevant to Antigone Kefala's reception. Firstly, in Sydney Greek circles there have historically been two major factions since the arrival in the 1920s of the Kastellorizians and Kytherians, the first groups of Greeks to come to Australia in big numbers. These factions are basically Left and

Right, with the Right being the conservative religious people and the Left being the less religious. As in Italy with Communists and the Church, it's possible for Australian Greeks to participate in both Left politics and the Church. My Australian-born Greek father was connected to the Atlas Club in Sydney, the Left part of the community. Antigone didn't connect to either of these Greek factions in Sydney because she was not religious on the one hand and was to some extent anti-Communist on the other, being a refugee from postwar Romania. And Greeks in Australia, like the Greeks in Greece, see Antigone as Romanian. She did, however, connect with Australian Greeks like sociologist Alex Kondos and anthropologist Vivian Kondos, a couple who had rejected traditional Greekness and were not part of the Greek community in Sydney either. In addition to this, the patriarchal nature of both Greek factions would have precluded her from being recognised as a writer, and importantly she didn't write in Greek. It's only in the last ten to fifteen years that the Sydney Greek community has acknowledged Antigone as a writer along with other women like Yota Krili, Sofia Catharios and me.

The conundrum occurs in the sense that one might like to be taken to the bosom of one's ethnic community, but the sexism and conservatism of the community precludes that. In the 1960s, Antigone instead connected to various Europeans in Sydney, and her husband was a Romanian Jew. The Greek community continues to be somewhat conservative today, being mostly patriarchal and homophobic. It's notable that Athenian Greeks regard Australian Greeks as old-fashioned and conservative, clinging to traditions that have all but disappeared in a city like Athens. It should be noted, as well, that an interest in poetry is as rare in the Greek-Australian community as it is in the wider Australian community.

That said, in the last twenty years, Antigone has received strong support from progressive Greek people such as: Vrasidas Karalis, professor of Greek at the University of Sydney; Yota Krili; Helen Nickas, previously at La Trobe University and publisher of Owl Publishing; Konstandina Dounis at La Trobe; George

Kanarakis from Charles Sturt University; and Nikos Papastergiadis of the University of Melbourne. As well, Antigone connected with the Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church, Stylianos Harkianakis, who was also a poet. It could be said, though, that Antigone was claimed by the Greek community at large after she had become well-known in the Anglo-Australian context.

In addition to the Greeks, Sneja Gunew, lately of the University of British Columbia, and Ivor Indyk at the University of Western Sydney have done a lot to promote Antigone's work at an academic level. Also, during the 1980s there were a number of anthologies that brought Greek and non-Anglo writing into public view, such as *Joseph's Coat* (ed. Peter Skrzynecki 1985), *Striking Chords* (ed. Gunew and Kateryna Longley 1992), and *Greek Voices in Australia* (ed. George Kanarakis 1987).

Antigone had substantial connections on an individual basis with Vasso Kalamaras, a writer from Perth, and ex-Australian Greeks poet Dennis Dinopoulos and painter Nikos Kypraios – both of whom returned to Greece. The situation of Dimitris Tsaloumas in Melbourne seems to have been a bit different. He was a man and wrote in Greek so enjoyed some support in the Greek community in Melbourne. Like Antigone, he became an English teacher and wrote in English, so was able to bridge both communities and has been widely published in Australia – especially by the University of Queensland Press (UQP), which published six of his books – and to some extent in Greece. Martin Duwell was poetry editor at UQP for some years so probably had an influence on that. Tsaloumas had a home in each country and moved between the two as many Greek-Australians do today. Antigone's family, however, after several generations in Romania and the ceding of Asia Minor to Turkey, had no home to claim in either Greece or Romania.

Within Antigone's own 'chosen' social circle of various artistic Europeans, I found that I had a problem dealing with the anti-Communism of Jurgis Janavicius, even though he was very supportive of my experimental writing. He had been raised

in a socialist family that was attacked by the Soviets during the Soviet occupation at the end of World War II. There were also disagreements about feminism. One night in the 1980s, I had a bit of a showdown at one get-together when a couple of the men, Rudi Krausmann and poet and music expert John Araneta, reacted to a feminist comment I made and came out with the proposition that 'there have never been any great women writers' and by analogy never would be because women were somehow constitutionally incapable. The statement was disturbing because half of the group around the table were women writers and artists, including Antigone. The men didn't seem to have any knowledge of the historical material about female practitioners or the feminist conflicts of the 1970s. I found it hard to connect with those men after that but Antigone remained in contact with Rudi, I guess because he was of her own prewar generation with views typical of that generation. These friends had a long history and always acknowledged and supported Antigone's work, but somehow they were unable to contextualise it within the ideology of 'the masterpiece'.

The second conundrum is that there has historically been a problem in Sydney feminist circles that they didn't fully embrace non-Anglo women early on. Once again, one might've liked to have been taken into the bosom of women's groups, but there was a feeling of exclusion from Anglo-Australian feminist circles. There was an unfortunate sense of patronisation of non-Anglo women on the one hand, and at the same time a sense that middle-class non-Anglo people should not expect special consideration when Indigenous and third-world women had far greater needs. This was a generally accepted idea in Left circles in Sydney that has prevailed until today.

The third conundrum is that in the 1960s in Left circles, the idea was that The Revolution came first, and women's liberation came second. I had an interesting dialogue along these lines with journalist Denis Freney of the Communist Party of Australia during the 1980s when he was organising the Sydney Marxist

Summer Schools and I suggested women should make up 50 per cent of the panels and talks. He felt that the ideas were paramount and commented that anyway there wasn't the pool of expertise among women and that the women weren't visible. His was a 'merit-based' argument not unlike the one in the Liberal-National coalition today.

My point is that we forget how insular and biased Australian society was in the years 1950 to 1972. Women didn't have equality in the eyes of the law, and financial independence was difficult. However, as in so many areas of Australian life, from the years of the Whitlam government, things started to improve. Antigone remembers the feeling of excitement in the Australia Council for the Arts, where she was working, when suddenly everything seemed possible. The White Australia Policy was abolished, and people working in the Australia Council wanted to become actively inclusive of Indigenous and non-Anglo practitioners. However, it is disappointing that, after all these years, the contents pages of poetry anthologies and magazines continue to be filled overwhelmingly with Anglo-Australian names.

For any writer in Australia (probably any writer anywhere) it's necessary first of all to gain the imprimatur of someone in authority, someone well-known or at least 'cool', to get published. This is usually demonstrated by having a book published, but it could also include publication in literary magazines. In my case, it was the Egyptian-English migrant Kris Hemensley with *Ear in a Wheatfield*[6] and Robert Kenny from Rigmarole Books, who noticed my work in *Magic Sam* magazine. Robert Kenny subsequently published my first book, *Italy*. In Antigone's case, the English migrants Rodney Hall (who was supportive of her work) and Martin Duwell were the persons of authority who gave her the first necessary imprimatur. Martin Duwell published Antigone's first book of poetry, *The Alien*, with Makar Press in 1973 and more recently has written reviews of her work in his online review journal *Australian Poetry Review* and in *The Sydney Review of Books*. In both our cases and in that of other

non-Anglo writers like ΠΟ, Komninos Zervos, Ania Walwicz, Angelo Loukakis, George Papaellinas and others, we were probably all taken up, given an imprimatur, partly because we were non-Anglo, by people who wanted to see greater diversity in Australian literature.

My proposition is that a writer's voice is formed in interaction with an audience, regardless of size. The systemic linguists talk about the element of tenor in writing, where the writer–reader relationship is established. All writing has an implied reader, and I think it's a particular imagined readership that Antigone hit upon when she first started writing in English, sitting in the Mitchell Library in Sydney in the 1960s. What Antigone was feeling at that time was that she had come home to a city that had a cultural life, that was ethnically diverse, and that was a place she could, in fact, find an audience beyond that of her highly literate and supportive mother.

Antigone's writing voice is not so much borne out of the migrant experience, as is often claimed about her, but has emerged in a liminal space – that is, a space that crosses conventional or physical boundaries, what Vrasidas Karalis calls 'her poetic dwelling' (262). Liminal spaces are staging grounds for the articulation of experiences that elude everyday language.[7] This liminal space is the one Antigone's work enters to deal with the experience of travelling to other countries and places and, in the collection *Journeys,* enables reflections on journeys both within Australia and outside of the country. This goes beyond the migrant experience as content, and is the space that much poetry in general occupies. Karalis states that 'all poets are aliens in their own culture, as they defend language from inauthenticity' (260). And *Journeys* resembles Antigone's other poetry. It is work that moves constantly across the boundaries of the public and the personal, the temporal and the eternal, the temporary and the permanent, the cosily familiar and the wholly alien, the culturally embedded and the universal, the topical and the universal, consciousness and unconsciousness, dream and mindfulness. Landscapes are often

seen at twilight, on the border of night and day. The writing deterritorialises by deleting specific references.

Antigone's work is quintessentially and self-consciously Australian in the sense that Australian Anglophone culture is liminal, a culture of crossed and overlapping references from outside itself, and except for the work of Indigenous practitioners, one that rarely beds down exclusively in local Indigenous culture or even in the here and now. Most Australian-Anglophone writers are more properly English or American writers – often unself-consciously so.

One doesn't find correlates in Australia in the works that are disingenuously naturalistic or purposefully obtuse. A poet friend, Kit Kelen, says that Antigone and Dimitris Tsaloumas have no Australian progenitors. But, aside from local progenitors, think David Lynch, think Japanese novelists, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, the French Nouveau Roman writers; move away from mainstream Australian canonical norms (often a kind of phoniness anyway) and the work beds down comfortably. What episodes of migration and travelling have done for Antigone's work is to loosen it from any specific cultural embeddedness.

Notes

1 Dorothy Economou is a lecturer in the Learning Centre, University of Sydney. More information is available at http://sydney.edu.au/education-portfolio/people/dorothy.economou.php

2 For more information, see Yota Krili's website Pteroti House www.yotakrili.com.

3 For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_performance_poetry.

4 *Xtext* was published once each year in 1996 and 1997. The editorial team was: Paula Abood, Mary Dimech, Gillian Fuller, Efi Hatzimanolis, Tinzar Lwyn and Brigitta Olubas. Sneja Gunew, Anna Couani and Antigone Kefala were members of the Editorial Advisory Committee.

5 For more information on Jurgis Janavicius, see the essay by Brigitta Olubas in this volume and www.slic.org.au/Culture/Jurgis.htm.

6 *Ear in a Wheatfield* was published by Kris Hemensley from 1973 to 1976. For more information on Hemensley and *Ear in a Wheatfield*, see http://graveneymarsh.blogspot.com/2008/09/ear-in-wheatfield.html.

7 My thinking around liminal literary space is drawn from a thesis by Adam Engel, 'Two worlds: the functions of liminal space in twentieth-century literature'.

Works cited

Bolton, Ken and Anna Couani, editors. *Magic Sam*, Sydney, Absoutely Furious Productions, 1977–8.

Couani, Anna. *Italy*, Melbourne, Rigmarole Books, 1977.

Couani, Anna with Peter Lyssiotis. *The Harbour Breathes*, Sydney, Sea Cruise Books/Masterthief, 1988.

Engel, Adam. 'Two worlds: the functions of liminal space in twentieth-century literature', PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2017.

Gunew, Sneja and Anna Couani, editors. *Telling Ways: Australian Women's Experimental Writing*, Adelaide, Australian Feminist Studies Publications, 1988.

Gunew, Sneja and Kateryna Longley, editors. *Striking Chords*: *Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1992.

Kanarakis, George. *Greek voices in Australia: a tradition of prose, poetry and drama*, Sydney, Australian National University Press, 1987.

Karalis, Vrasidas & Helen Nickas. *Antigone Kefala: a writer's journey*, Brighton Vic, Owl Publishing, 2013.

Kefala, Antigone. *The Alien*, Sydney, Makar Press, 1973.

—— *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *Absence*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1992.

—— Sydney Journals: Reflections 1970–2000, Artarmon NSW, Giramondo, 2008.

—— *Journeys*, Brighton, Owl Publishing, 2019.

Krausmann, Rudi and Triesch, Gisela, editors. *Made in Australia*, Sydney, Gangan Books, 1994.

Krili, Yota. *Triptych*, bilingual Greek/English edition, Brighton, Owl Publishing, 2003.

—— *Katavoles*, Sydney, Pteroti House, 2013.

—— *Kyparissomilo*, Sydney, Pteroti House, 2014.

—— *Kyklamino*, Sydney, Pteroti House, 2016.

—— *Falling Stars*, bilingual Greek/English edition, Sydney, Pteroti House, 2018.

Skrzynecki, Peter, editor. *Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1985.

9

We had nowhere to go: Artist Friendships and Migrant Poetics in the Work of Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius

Brigitta Olubas

Antigone Kefala's contribution to the creative arts in postwar Australia extends well beyond her own writing. She also made a significant contribution to the public field of the arts in Australia through her work at the Australia Council for the Arts, at a decisive period when conceptions of Australian culture were being honed and defined. That work has in turn informed understandings of the arts as broad and complex practices, embedded in the real work of real people, sustained across conventional divisions of high culture and community arts, and between mainstream, institutionally supported art and the art pursued in other contexts, including experimental art, and the art and writing being produced by migrant practitioners. Further, as Anna Couani's essay in this collection details, Kefala was central to a number of significant arts groups and circles that developed in Sydney

across this period, circles that brought together writers and artists from a range of cultural, political and aesthetic backgrounds and inclinations, in ways that were grounded in but also generative of networks of friendships and personal associations. The distinctive nature of Antigone Kefala's involvement in, and contribution to, the arts in Australia provides us with important insights into the complexity and diversity of that scene, and into the idea of what I am calling migrant poetics. In this essay I want to pursue some of these ways of thinking about arts practice, not so much in terms of the practices that concepts such as high culture and community arts might differentiate but rather in relation to the points where they meet, inform and complicate each other. I want to think of migrant poetics as a point where a local or 'amateur' practice of writing draws on and intersects with international circles through diasporic connections, but also through cosmopolitan intellectual engagements, themselves often, ironically enough, beyond the grasp of the provincial arts scene in postwar Australia. More particularly, I want to take up the contradictions implicit in this scene – where talented and accomplished artists found themselves unable to break through into the 'mainstream' of local institutionalised art while at the same time producing high-quality work, being recognised by parallel institutions in other centres overseas and also establishing and maintaining connections with major international artists – in order to expand our understanding of what is produced by, and also what is at stake in, making a claim to migrant poetics.

I will take up these questions through a consideration of the friendship between Antigone Kefala and Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius, two artists and writers of Lithuanian background who had arrived in Australia in the late 1940s in the early waves of postwar refugees from the Displaced Persons camps in Germany.[1] While not widely known outside the circles they shared with Kefala, the Janaviciuses had substantial careers primarily as visual artists, in which field they achieved success, mainly internationally: they participated in global networks of writers and artists across

the domains of painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramics and sculpture, and through the delicate logics of postwar diasporas. They were also, in a more informal register, writers, sharing their work amongst small groups of friends, and through these networks and connections also publishing their work. I want to use their work to look more closely at the poetics of migration and displacement but also of re-establishment, connection and reconnection across old and new homelands and a range of creative fields and communities. I will focus primarily on the Janaviciuses' writing, even though this was a secondary practice for them both. In foregrounding their writing I am hoping to do two things: first to set the question of the language, the poetics of displacement and self-establishment at the heart of the art being produced, and second to explore the particular capacities of the amateur artist or writer, working outside established institutions and formations of culture. I am arguing that both these propositions – the poetics of disestablishment and re-establishment and the figure of the amateur – are akin in interesting ways to the condition of migrant aesthetics more broadly. In flagging the idea of the amateur working in minor ways, around and outside mainstream culture, I'm following the etymology, the idea of valuing the practice of writing or reading, as Francis Steegmuller put it, 'only for love' (Hazzard), and what the Janaviciuses' friend writer George Alexander described as a 'generous ardour for all subjects and topics', exhibited in asking questions, pursuing lines of inquiry: 'Everything was VERY INTERESTING' (10). Roland Barthes writes that the amateur seeks 'to produce only his own enjoyment', and is thus defined 'not necessarily … by a lesser knowledge, an imperfect technique' but rather as 'the one who does not make himself heard'. For Barthes, amateurism is located 'simultaneously at the highest and the lowest level: as the Arcanum of enjoyment and as a modest hobby not to be exhibited'; a domain of pleasure not extended to or concerned with the paying public (230). The ethic being invoked here has to do with, first of all, integrity – the authority

of the work itself as it moves across otherwise delineated and demarcated domains of culture, stepping away from commercial success, and, as such, a concept always already aligned with the figure of the artist more broadly.

Above all, the figure of the amateur does not signify a lesser aesthetic achievement, as can be seen when we look more closely at poetry by both Jurgis and Jolanta. 'Return at Dusk' is the final poem in Jurgis' 1971 collection, *Journey to the Moon: Poems 1962–1970*:

> In summer when the bats fanned out at dusk
> across the waters from the island
> the voyager returned. By then
> old Roy had set his traps, the midgets dozed
> in their calash, there was no forcing nothing,
> no blaze, only a murmur, a gentle wash and sucking of the tide.
> **But as the evening darkened the outlines of**
> **the trees assumed stark, heroic proportions, utzonian**
> **fangs pointed moonwards and faraway lights blinked**
> **at the punt. And yet there was nothing bared, nothing**
> **easily woundable, odd words maybe, like zhuvis,**
> **sidabras, vakaras … words which here had no defence.**
> As a weapon, he mused, all memories are pathetic,
> All memories are blunted, all memories soft.
> Tek! Tek!
> A trap snapped shut. Along
> Thin plumes of mist, treading on crofts of soldier crabs he
> walked towards the lights
> On moonlit sands. (emphasis in original) (Janavicius, *Journey*, 62–63)

Here the scene of catching fish, centred around the returning 'voyager', draws on myth to create a sense of long tradition, of familiar, repeated actions not bound to a specific location or culture. The touching of the local scene with threads of combat – the weapons, wounds, soldier crabs – and sense of the

heroic likewise binds an Australian scene to traditions that could be European or Indigenous. The poem draws these disparate worlds together as a temporal move, through the articulation of seasonality and the diurnal. The shift of tone in the central section comes first from the neologistic 'utzonian fangs' invoking not just the urban location of Utzon's opera house but also, I think, the contentions of Modernist aesthetics in Australian culture, so that Sydney is rendered cosmopolitan, ironically a construction of foreigners, such as Utzon or Kefala, or indeed Janavicius. And from this point of division or threat come the 'words which had here no defence': *Zhuvis*, *sidabras*, *vakaras*. Words – fish, silver, evening – that are at the heart of the poem's capacity to represent the scene, and in their 'blunt[ness]' and 'soft[ness]' to attend to what has been lost, and mark the resistant pull of (foreign) words in the mouth, a pull that takes us into the trap at the poem's end, 'Tek! Tek!', as an engagement with a new landscape and with the persistence of what need not – cannot – be translated.

Jolanta's poem 'To Virginia Cuppaidge'[2] describes viewing a painting by an Australian artist who had relocated to New York. Cuppaidge was not a member of the Janaviciuses' circles; Jolanta's response to her work is based simply in her formal appreciation of it. In so doing it invokes the activity of visiting galleries, viewing contemporary art, as part of one's days and daily lives. All this sits outside the experience of the natural world, outside the city depicted in 'Return to Dusk', but it also speaks to the larger circuits to which such activities gesture, that is to say other cities, the cosmopolis of art. More particularly, the poem presents a quite distinct displacement for the artist: the imperatives of abstraction and of the dislocations intrinsic to a global art scene, set alongside the experience of being brought back into an intimate, even domestic relation of shared creative work:

> New paintings from New York
> painting no. 6, Heart …
> very feminine

expressive
virgin blue
a bit of purple tantrum
the little cloud
romantic, solid
the red triangle
heartfelt feelings
a few white arrows
piercing the heart
a very controversial thought
brown and
royal blue strip
arrested
facing the little cream cloud
some lighthearted streamers
a few exotic leaves.
that's no. 6
at Bloomfield galleries. (Gunew and Mahyuddin 41)

The gaze here is contracted, shrunk to the scale of a solitary viewer of a single artwork, but also, in spite of its eloquence and the precision of its viewing, to the simple, quotidian language of a humble, non-specialised response to the work: 'heartfelt feeling', 'a bit of purple tantrum', 'facing the little cream cloud'. The simplicity of these phrases, presented in short lines with almost no punctuation, enacts a kind of amateur speech, a quietness, a refusal to gild self-articulation in poetic flourish, or to draw on an artist's lexicon to describe the painting (even though the viewer is herself a practising artist). The poem imagines poetic connection operating within an intimate context, aligning cosmopolitan connections with domestic, even homely, reference points. It commemorates these private, unauthorised responses while at the same time gesturing to their global resonances.

George Alexander sets the question of language at the heart of what he understood as Jurgis Janavicius' project. Outlining

Jurgis' early years in Australia, working on the Warragamba Dam project and as a clerk at a timber mill, marrying and having children, Alexander writes that:

> All the while, … [he] carried the perspective of Poetry with him, the big picture idea of it, and refracted the whole world through it with great energy. In the sixties, in Canberra, Jurgis began to write in English. Not bad for someone who learnt English through a correspondence course. His compelling book of poetry, *Journey to the Moon*, was published in 1971. The voice in these poems is part Don Quixote, part Moby Dick – and the journey he takes us on was a way of coping psychologically with the fallout of violent war …, a way of dealing with exile from Lithuania and coming to grips with the virtues from that past. *Journey to the Moon* is also about his arrival in Australia: 'our names were now a joke' … (6)

Alexander also recalls the importance of community for Jurgis, and again it is the verbal and poetic experience that is central: 'Creating a community mattered. When you were around him you felt the excitement – and the moral necessity – of working with words' (9). Jurgis and Jolanta were both involved in artist and writer communities, for instance the Kelly Street Kollective (an artist-run space that aimed to promote practitioners independently of mainstream art structures and institutions) and No Regrets workshops; a point that speaks to the ways their work developed outside formal institutions. Jolanta had formal fine-arts training in the Displaced Persons camp in Freiburg, then studied ceramics at various institutions in Sydney including the National Art School and East Sydney Tech, and for twenty years taught classes at Mulawa Women's Prison. Jurgis, on the other hand, was largely self-trained. He took up sketching while he worked as a hydrographer in western New South Wales, along the Darling River, then went on to do some fine-arts study after his retirement. Both came to writing later in life and were self-published or

published in little magazines edited by others from their writing circles. There was an aesthetic choice involved here, a decision to expand the 'narrow aesthetic base' (Blonski 22) of traditional arts practice; working outside such formal boundaries was itself important for the aesthetic integrity of those networks. And there is a particular form of the cosmopolitan at play in such decisions, which has a striking resonance in the Australian context, recalling not just Joseph Furphy, 'an autodidact whose lifetime was spent in manual labour but whose intellectual ambitions were set at an early age' (Croft), but also the origins and longer traditions of the *Bulletin*, the 'chief effects' of which 'were to popularize bush life as a subject [and] to encourage amateurs to write' (Goodwin 36). These associations also provide a larger context for Jurgis' coming to art and writing through his work as a hydrographer, and the Janaviciuses' shared project of engaging closely with the Australian landscape by taking long trips driving through western New South Wales and then further inland across the continent.

Antigone Kefala met the Janaviciuses in the early 1970s when she was working in Multicultural Arts at the Australia Council. She had written to artists and writers from non-Anglo backgrounds asking them to complete a survey on their lives and work. In response, Jurgis contacted Kefala and invited her to their home in Manly in Sydney's north. The friendship was immediate, significant and long-lasting. Jolanta recalled that Kefala would accompany them to art events, as well as on extensive explorations of their adopted homeland; they made long trips inland from Sydney through country towns, with little in the way of an itinerary or plan beyond the intention of seeing firsthand the landscape, terrain, life-forms and communities of Australia outside the urban centres.

> We filled in our surveys and then Jurgis telephoned and invited Antigone. I remember her walking up, here, the first time we met … We clicked straight away. We were always going to exhibitions, openings, galleries, and we always took Antigone

> with us. And I remember we explored Australia, very much; travelling all the time, by car of course. And Antigone came along very often … We would start driving, and would warn Antigone, 'We don't stop for four hours.' 'O but we have to have a coffee!' 'Not before four hours!'
>
> Jurgis drives three hours, I drive one or two hours, and then we have a big break, somewhere in the bush; we carried food, we had a little siesta, and we drove then another five hours. So we covered a lot of country … Going inland. First stop used to be Dubbo, because we had friends in Dubbo, a geologist from Chile … And then started early in the morning to go to Broken Hill … Spend the night and then off we would go. To Darwin, all around Australia … We didn't have a plan, we just wanted to get to know Australia.[3]

The account Jolanta provides here of a friendship grounded in the arts *and* in the landscape, in visits to galleries and long drives through the bush and the Australian interior, delineates a migrant project that has as its aim to make oneself at home in a new place, the aim of embedding oneself in a country through the forms of the land and the energies of its culture. It also insists that creative practice and creative responses are central to the process of coming to be at home, in a new country or an old one. Jolanta made the connection explicit in an interview that she did with Sneja Gunew in the early 1990s:

> First and foremost, I consider myself as a creative person living in Australia … I lived half a century in Australia and I'm an Australian citizen and I learned to love this country. It's a fantastic continent, very beautiful nature. We travel a lot and the more we travel the more we appreciate it.[4]

The Janaviciuses considered this kind of engagement with the land to be at odds with prevailing Anglo-Australian culture, as Jolanta explained to Gunew:

It's very sad that the inhabitants of Australia – specifically the Anglo-Australians – don't have any strong feelings for the country. They didn't appreciate it. They don't appreciate it … They don't realize they have a fantastic continent, such a beautiful, rich, wealthy continent. They didn't feel responsible. They just didn't care for it.[5]

What is important here is the way Jolanta proposes a direct line of contact for the new immigrant to the land, sidestepping the complications of settler-colonial experience. The claim to an (almost) unmediated engagement with the land itself might be discerned in Jolanta's paintings of native animals: close-up portraits of individual animals – a wallaby, or a wombat – against backgrounds of repeated abstract forms that suggest an aestheticised – and aesthetic – habitat. Further, these works can be placed within the context of a distinctively if not exclusively *migrant* view of Australian landscape in the postwar period, through the defining work of Tasmanian wildlife photographers Olegas Truchanas (1923–72) and Peter Dombrovskis (1945–96). Truchanas was Dombrovskis' mentor; both were 'Balts'[6] who had come to Australia from the European Displaced Persons camps, and whose work tellingly restaged the Australian wilderness, particularly in Tasmania, making it aesthetically meaningful for a wider audience. In particular, the photographs of Truchanas and Dombrovskis comprised signal moments in the mass national and international activist campaigns around the Australian wilderness through the 1970s and 1980s.[7] This very particular migrant response to the landscape could be connected to another view, expressed by Raimond Gaita, another postwar arrival. For Gaita, the Australian landscape was mediated, ultimately, by aesthetic traditions and sensibilities shared between migrants and Anglo-Celts, but it became legible, meaningful, to him in the first instance through the 'European' lens of his father's sensibilities:

> Most immigrants found the countryside alien and hostile. Their children usually came to love it, but often in ways that showed

> their origins. Because I accepted my father's European fatalism and made it my own, the light and the colours of Central Victoria became for me the light and colours of tragedy. Many people have remarked that they hear a distinctive voice in my work. That voice was formed growing up in the landscape of central Victoria with my Romanian father, his Romanian friend Pantelimon Hora, haunted by my German mother, amongst the Anglo-Celtic men and women who farmed it and worked its towns. (xviii)

There is of course always a complex interchange of inherited and discovered responses to new and remembered landscapes. The Janaviciuses drew on European, most often Modernist, representational and aesthetic traditions, in their apprehension of an imagined 'local' Australia, but these are always mediated by the local, trafficked across the global contexts of contemporary arts practice. To produce a series of ceramic bowls for an exhibition in London in the early 1990s, Jolanta had clay shipped from New Zealand, carried eucalyptus leaves with her in her luggage, and then produced the bowls from the transported materials, literalising both local contexts of the making, transporting and exhibiting of the work. A similar point might be made with reference to some of Jurgis' writing. In addition to the poetry mentioned earlier, he wrote sketches in Lithuanian based around his Australian experiences – wry, fleeting tales of a half-familiar world, domestic and whimsical, ranging from a visit to a fellow hydrographer's home on the shores of Botany Bay, to a visit to Brewarrina and reflection on the 1987 riots there, to a deadpan account of possums moving into a suburban home, or as George Alexander summarises:

> The westward escape from war-torn Lithuania, the smuggler carrying two tons of spirits while crossing the border river, being attacked by a night bird, the story of the guard sitting naked in a vat of warm chocolate to escape the cold. (9)

These sketches might refer Australian readers to the well-known *Bulletin* traditions that brought together local and international, professional and amateur readers and writers – '[*The Bulletin*] was read and contributed to by drovers, shearers, miners, fencing-contractors, bullock-team drivers ("bullockies") and small farmers' (Goodwin 37) – except of course that they were written in Lithuanian and published in Lithuania (in 2001, as *Tada ir mes: Laiškai iš Australijos*) for a very particular and singular audience. The title of his collection is itself suggestive of the lightness with which Jurgis aimed to inhabit the space in-between of the migrant experience; the Lithuanian title itself conceals an (untranslated) word play: 'Then and Us: Letters from Australia'. Here the 'sharpness that came from being an outsider to a dominant culture, internalising an "us" and "them" awareness' noted by Alexander, is filed off to make a subtly different point about the temporality of connection, or the way that connections might be forged by knowing words and turns of phrase. The internationalism of *Tada ir mes* is at once central to its purpose and occasion, and at the same time almost impossible to grasp; it speaks to the kinds of expertise and insight brought by migrant writers, working across multiple languages, to their work, expertise that nonetheless remains obscure or illegible to a monolingual audience. Jurgis' title indicates the wry pleasure that might be taken by the writer in such a context, a pleasure added to that of the amateur, working always outside.

As noted earlier, much of the Janaviciuses' work was exhibited and published internationally, including in Lithuania, where their work provided a kind of representation of Australia by locals, but in a form not readily accessed by other locals. This is precisely the kind of aesthetic world that Antigone Kefala was urging the Australia Council to imagine in her reports; the local scene drawn into a diaspora, or a cosmopolis, and reimagined. And it depended, always, on the local scene, whether in Vilnius or in Sydney, including, in relation to poetry, the wealth of small presses and magazines that proliferated in the 1970s with which Kefala and the Janaviciuses were involved. These small magazines

were central to the development of diverse and often very local poetry scenes and communities. Small magazines have been important for the development of literary experimentation since the late nineteenth century; indeed, *The Bulletin* is the exemplary Australian example. And the ethos of small magazines has always tended to an amateur ethic, as Michael Barsanti observes of the centrality of these outlets in the rise of literary modernism that '[t]hose who published little magazines were amateurs and often artists themselves', and that '[t]heir goals were more likely to be artistic than commercial'. From this, as modes of cultural production, Modernist little magazines constituted what David Bennett describes as an 'antithesis of the cultural monument' (485) and Alan Golding describes as an 'intervention' (703) in the process of canon formation; qualities that informed the revival of these outlets in the 1960s and 1970s (Churchill and McKible), including in Australia.

From 1969 to 1973, Jurgis edited *Poetry & Prose Broadsheet*, and in response to a 1977 questionnaire run by the scholarly journal *Australian Literary Studies* on the subject of 'Little Magazines',[8] he highlighted the following aims of the magazine:

> [to] publish … writing which, due to its *unconventionality*, *newness* or other characteristics, would possibly remain unpublished …
> [to] present work (sometimes already published) in a form closer to the tastes and expectations of a poetry-appreciating *minority* …
> [to publish] poets whose work was *outside the mainstream* of Australian poetry at the time …
> [to publish] poetry and prose of *newcomers to this country* …
> ('Statement' 210; emphasis added).

This schema places 'the writing of newcomers to the country' automatically and straightforwardly alongside the experimental, the unconventional, the minor, even when the writing was not,

as the Janaviciuses' work was not, in itself, necessarily avant-garde. Like the 'utzonian fangs', the foreign is, perhaps, always newly arrived, even as it is also settled into the environment. Jurgis described the intended audience of the magazine as 'the circle of friends + poetry reading people we knew + some book shops and libraries + chance', and its achievement as 'We know we have done something we enjoyed doing', indicating the importance of the context of local and amateur writing networks for this work. Nonetheless, the concepts of community and network do not necessarily apply in a straightforward way. Sneja Gunew raised this issue in an interview with Jurgis in 2000:

> This business of contacting people and getting to know people, whether one likes it or not, one establishes a kind of a network and this sort of network of various people whom one visits, revisits, is in communication with, could be described as a kind of a community. It's very loose, it's very much based on individual needs and, as I say, they're idiosyncratic. But that could be a kind of a community.
>
> You were also part of a kind of a loose group, or whatever you want to call it, who – I know it's very ad hoc – meets semi-regularly just to share each other's work, particularly writing.[9]

However, Jurgis rejected this idea: 'Well, that has nothing to do with networking. Nothing whatsoever'. He posited instead a classical idea of poetic community, a poetic life of the mind, dependent on a minority aesthetic, not necessarily elite, that exists very much in opposition to a stable or institutional formation and that speaks to a political if not aesthetic conservatism.[10]

The poetic community is central to the ways the Janaviciuses' larger diasporic connections open out into the world. Alongside her recollection of trips into the bush with Antigone, Jolanta recalls a similar trip with Adolfas Mekas, who with his brother Jonas Mekas[11] was a significant figure in the postwar New York avant-garde film scene:

> At the [Sydney] Opera House they used to have these very exciting concerts and one concert was 'world first' of cats performing … so of course Jurgis and I went. The performer was Pola Chapelle Mekas, she was married to Adolfas Mekas, and Jurgis knew the Mekas brothers … The concert was really amazing: there was this piano, a cat starts and slowly goes across the keys. Then if you closed your eyes you think you're listening to Debussy. Very sophisticated music. It was really amazing … After the performance we went to the stage door, introduced ourselves … We were so happy to find each other … Jurgis offered, he said 'If you have time, I can take you all day into the bush'. O yes, they would love to see the bush … So Jurgis said, 'Be ready at four o'clock in the morning'. We picked them up, it was winter, dark, and we drove to Kurrajong … You know how beautiful Kurrajong is. When we were going down to the valley, it was all white. The mist. And then suddenly the sun was coming through and the trees were coming up through the mist. It was absolutely magic. We stopped at Jenolan Caves … and then we drove all through the bush … Then we visited them in New York and stayed in their lounge room. In 1978 … Later they came to Australia again, stayed with us; we went sailing, travelling.[12]

Here again, engagement with contemporary, experimental art sits readily and unremarkably alongside an embeddedness in the landscape; and, again, is the basis for a significant artistic friendship across lines of the local and the celebrated. These international networks are grounded in particular stories of Lithuania before and during the war and of the postwar diaspora. Jolanta explained that Jurgis had known Jonas and Adolfas Mekas during the Soviet occupation, and he had also been a childhood friend of George (Jurgis) Maciunas, another celebrated New York–based avant-garde artist, one of the founders of the 'anti-art' project/movement Fluxus.[13] The Mekas brothers later offered the

Janaviciuses an exhibition in New York, an offer they were not able to take up. Nonetheless, the connections were substantial, and indicate something of the extent to which the Australian arts scene was opened up to new networks being formed through postwar diasporas, while at the same time speaking to the amateur, small-scale, domestic, even familial site of many such connections and networks.

The work of Jonas Mekas was itself built from principles grounded in amateur practice, and in many of its features highlights not only the Janaviciuses' relations to global arts scenes but also some of the enacted displacements of their relation to Lithuania, and it bears further attention in that light. The title of this essay is built around a reference to *I Had Nowhere to Go*, Mekas' memoir of his departure from Lithuania, his time in the German Displaced Persons camps, an experience not dissimilar in many ways to that of the Janaviciuses, and his arrival in the US. Most particularly, I want to draw attention to the specifics of the 'Nowhere' of migration that Mekas flags in the absence of choice or birthright for the refugee or displaced person, and to think about it in relation to the robust engagement of place seen in the Janaviciuses' embrace of Australian landscape. In Mekas' title and in his memoir itself, the no-place of displacement takes on gritty substance; it comprises the lost homeland and the searing loneliness of arrival but also the looking forward that is inherent in avant-garde aesthetics, the 'unconventionality, newness' signalled by Janavicius in the *Poetry & Prose Broadsheet*.

In 2017, two years before his death at the age of 96, Jonas Mekas performed at the New York Poetry Marathon, presenting a spoken-word piece reflecting on central preoccupations of his poetry and filmmaking. This performance provides a compelling point of entry to his work:

> I worked all my life to become young.
> No, you can't persuade me to get old; I will die twenty-seven.
> I was born, I grew up, old.

My youth was spent in old and among old.
Then I worked hard to become young,
And now I have reached that point:
A way of becoming.
I'm not an exception –
I think I am a normal case.
Others have been deprived of youth by circumstances:
Parents, excesses of food, sex, passions, existential nonsense etcetera.
Thank you, Angels, for protecting me from it all.
Thank you, Angels, for guiding me to love normal, earthly pleasures: wine, song, and women.
Body? My body always took care of itself.
I was always somewhere else.
I am amazed it still holds so well.
It will last a good while,
So I am not worried, my friends.
My ideals are those old people, men and women, in old countries, that I used to see as a child.
The old man who used to visit my father when I was a child.
He used to climb on the roof of our house and stand on his head.
On the chimney.
I was told he was one hundred.[14]

At the heart of Mekas' performance is the question of human and poetic time, enacted by the poet's halting diction and the slow savour of the foreign words of English in his mouth. Also central is the poetic body, which, Mekas tells us, 'always took care of itself' while he 'was … somewhere else,' and which 'will last a good while'. The poet's body sees time cohering, and while it 'last[s]', the poet works to 'become young … a way of becoming' and to remain 'a normal case', unlike the old man who, in a time and place of memory, stood on his head on the chimney on the roof of Mekas' childhood home. This upending of time structures Mekas' access to the lost homeland, and his perspective

is always weighted by his body and his mouthing of words across the experiences of displacement.

In Mekas' 1972 film, *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, we see and hear this poetic time. His accented voice-over binds his body and its capacity to 'last' into the film's poetry. Again, we have words in the mouth, bound here more tightly by memory:

> All the women of my village that I remember from my childhood, they always reminded me of the birds; sad, autumn birds, as they fly over the fields, crying sadly. You led hard and sad lives, the women of my childhood.[15]

The women are drawn into the film's present by the vocative direct address, and the subtitled voice-over, even while their solemn stance beside a grave or their determined gait, walking to the cooking fire or across the fields, binds them to an immemorial past, accessible only through the faltering footage that threatens to collapse even as we watch. Mekas' mother makes potato pancakes, while her sons, visiting from the US, feed the fire for her; their urban dress and sharp boots mark them as outsiders now in their childhood home, where they are forever at home. The images of family, the countryside, of poor dwelling, of birds in fields, flicker across our eyes; the scenes we witness are made and remade into our own memories through the film's halting energy and the elegiac embrace of the voice-over.

Maureen Turim flags this drawing together of memories as a function of the cut-up collage nature of Mekas' film:

> The camera bounces through a scene saccadically, jumping or raking focus from close-up to distance, or from whole to fragment, from moment to different moment, as if to reassemble a larger picture by this fragmented collage of what might otherwise be seen as a more continuous whole … The activity of glimpsing is not just nervous, it is provocative, meant to stimulate an active seeing. (quoted in Kouvaros n.p.)

George Kouvaros, writing of Mekas, observes that 'to emigrate always involves a dismantling of the world'. He refers us to Mekas' voice-over in his 1976 film, *Lost, Lost, Lost*:

> I know I am sentimental. You would like these images to be more abstract. It's OK. Call me sentimental. You sit in your own homes. But I speak with an accent, and you don't even know where I come from. These are some images and some sounds recorded by someone in exile. (n.p.)

In this observation, this flat description of the film as simply images and sounds recorded by an exile – as if there is no other way for an exile to represent the world than through the fractured, 'saccadic' visual rhythms of his films – Mekas opens out the question of how what is lost, while no doubt bound to the sentimental, is also aligned to the avant-garde. There is a temporal disjunction at work here: looking back to what is lost as a move structuring a new poetic, impossibly located in an unstable present.

An important essay on Mekas' poetry from the early 1970s by Lithuanian critic Rimvydas Silbajoris opens with a claim about the constitution of Lithuanian poetics in melancholy, which, Silbajoris argues, enacts a certain anachronism in the contemporary world:

> There are words which tend to lose their sharp outlines of meaning over the years, because the flow of time and events rubs them smooth and easy on the tongue, makes them synonymous with others, like so many pebbles in a riverbed. Such a word for us Balts is 'exile'. We left our homes a long time ago; but now as we sit in our pleasant houses and look at the green grass, what is an exile, a refugee, an immigrant, an émigré? Are we now like the East Asians driven from Uganda, or like the children of Bangla Desh, or perhaps like the Vietnamese, straggling across moonscapes made by man? With us, the word 'exile'

> has become a habit of speech, a distant cousin to the reality of experience, which was imposed on us once and a pale memory of which we still possess. What remains real is a sense of loss and a yearning to fill a vague emptiness in the heart. To the extent that the present moment fails to appease this gnawing anguish, we tend to turn back to our past, searching for a remembrance to call our own. Surprisingly, at times the feeling of having truly been at home comes to us with the memory of places which were then already on the trek of exile, already foreign when we lived in them. Indeed, it seems at times that memory itself is our only home. (327)

The highly conventional melancholy of Lithuanian poetic sensibility is also, thus, a persistent mismatch with the present day, the now of whenever it is being read, between the specifics of displacement as experienced by Baltic post–World War II refugee-émigrés and the vast and world-defining displacements of others before, since and to come.

But Jonas Mekas does not only write about Lithuania, or the Displaced Persons camps, or America. In his 1951 poetry collection *Reminiscences* (its title anticipates the title of his 1972 film), Mekas invokes an Australian landscape, in an elliptical, enigmatic, highly personal reference to what Silbajoris calls 'the grave of someone dear to him':

> Under the blazing Australian sky
> lies the grave of my Regina. Burned by sun
> and gently stroked by hot sand, and by the cool of night,
> as if guarded by their hands.
>
> Sleep, sleep, under the blue eyes of the sky – anyway
> I shall no longer see them, nor shall they see
> the distant sky of childhood.
> I will only carry with me,
> two moist and pearly drops of dew. (Mekas 131)

The Australian landscape here has a mythic caste, almost without referential qualities, and it bears a vision that is above all sentimental. For Silbajoris, this move in the poem is 'the movement of an emotion':

> In thus feeling sky, and distance, and his love, Mekas redeems his loss and can go on across the world and be at home … From here, also, comes the ability to articulate the special meaning of an exile which is not a dispossession. (332)

But if we read Mekas' 'Australia' through the lens created by the poetry of Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius, the lament, 'Where is my home, my land, my country?' might be read not literally but rather within the profound dislocation of an imagined 'Australia'. Mekas' 'blazing sky', 'the grave of my Regina' is precisely the 'Nowhere' of 'Nowhere to go', the inevitable destination of diasporic poetics, the 'distant sky of childhood'. And when read alongside the 'Australia' that is imagined and presented by Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius, Mekas' sky is no longer remote and abstract; rather it is inflected with the long drives across the continent in order to 'see Australia'; it is etched by the 'blunted' and 'soft' words which 'had no defence', by the 'utzonian fangs pointed moonwards', and by the 'New paintings from New York'. The Janaviciuses' sharply local observations of their 'new' homeland Australia inflect a poetics that can feed back into larger currents of exilic, diasporic and experimental artworlds, signalled by, but not confined to, the figure of Jonas Mekas. This poetics might also lead us back to the informal but sustained networks in which Jurgis and Jolanta Janavicius produced their work, networks that have largely not been included in broad understandings of the Australian literary or arts scenes across the past half century, and which yet included significant and acclaimed figures including Antigone Kefala herself. Tracing such unremarked networks and lives allows different kinds of aesthetic and imaginative formations to become visible, including the largely invisible

domains of amateur arts practice, signalling the work of 'the one who does not make himself heard', the one who is not concerned to engage with 'the paying public' as a distinct aesthetic choice and achievement. This, too, is something that is informed by the larger contribution of Antigone Kefala – beyond the impact and stimulus of her writing and her friendship through these networks, there is this ongoing argument for broader and newer and more capacious understandings of the arts in making and remaking communities both small and large.

Notes

1 This essay draws on an interview with Jolanta Janavicius by Brigitta Olubas as well as on very substantial oral history interviews done by Sneja Gunew nearly twenty years previously, and on artworks and poetry owned by Antigone Kefala and Jolanta Janavicius.

2 The poem was published under the name of Jolanta Garolis in the landmark 1988 collection *Beyond the Echo*, edited by Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin.

3 Jolanta Janavicius, interview by Brigitta Olubas, Sydney, 20 May 2019 (UNSW HREAP approval no HC190141; transcript held at School of the Arts and Media UNSW).

4 Jolanta Janavicius, interview.

5 Jolanta Janavicius, interview.

6 'Balts' was the term widely used in Australia for the first wave of post–World War II immigrants, drawn from the Displaced Persons camps of Eastern Europe, who had come mainly from the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. See Persian 2017 and also Olubas 2003 for a fuller discussion.

7 The centrality of Dombrovskis' work in particular to the rise of mainstream environmental activism in this period has been widely noted – see, for example: http://artsreview.com.au/dombrovskis-journeys-into-the-wild-koenning-swell/; www.smh.com.au/national/when-a-picture-packs-punch-20040610-gdj3d3.html; https://mygobe.com/explore/the-photo-that-saved-the-franklin-river/.

8 In 1977, *Australian Literary Studies* published a special issue (vol. 8, no. 2) devoted to Australian small magazines.

9 Jurgis Janavicius, interview with Sneja Gunew, Sydney, 3 February 2000 (transcript held at UBC).

10 Anna Couani notes Jurgis Janavicius' political conservatism in her essay in this volume.

11 See Mekas' *New Yorker* obituary for a brief account of his work and significance: www.newyorker.com/news/postscript/my-debt-to-jonas-mekas.

12 Jolanta Janavicius, interview by Brigitta Olubas.

13 See www.artsy.net/series/art-history-101/artsy-editorial-fluxus-movement-art-museums-galleries.

14 Mekas' 2017 Poetry Marathon performance can be viewed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkWgK6rf9rk.

15 An extract, 'Mama bakes potato pancakes', from *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlC350qW3i0.

Works cited

Alexander, George. 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being Jurgis'. *Jurgis Janavicius: Artist, Poet, Photographer and…*, 2013. Published privately by the Janavicius family.

Barsanti, Michael. 'Little Magazines'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 2017.

Barthes, Roland. 'Réquichot and His Body'. *The Responsibility of Forms*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985.

Bennett, David. 'Periodical Fragments and Organic Culture: Modernism, the Avant-Garde, and the Little Magazine'. *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 30, no. 4, winter 1989, pp. 480–502.

Blonski, Annette. *Arts for a Multicultural Australia 1973–1991: An Account of Australia Council Policies*, Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts, 1992.

Churchill, Suzanne and Adam McKible, editors. *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016.

Croft, Julian. '*Such Is Life* by Joseph Furphy'. *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, edited by Paul Schellinger, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 1297.

Gaita, Raimond. '*Romulus, My Father*: From Book to Screenplay to Film'. *Romulus, My Father: Screenplay*, edited by Nick Drake, Sydney, Currency Press, 2007, pp. vii–xxiv.

Golding, Alan. 'Little Magazines and Alternative Canons: The Example of Origin'. *American Literary History*, vol. 2, no. 4, winter 1990, pp. 691–725.

Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*, Sydney, Macmillan, 1986.

Gunew, Sneja and Jan Mahyuddin, eds. *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing*, St Lucia, UQP, 1988.

Hazzard, Shirley. 'Lives Well Lived: Francis Steegmuller; Our Reading List'. *New York Times*, 1 January 1995, section 6, p. 22.

Janavicius, Jurgis. *Journey to the Moon: Poems 1962-1970*, Sydney, Poetry and Prose Publications, 1971.

—— 'Statement: Poetry and Prose Broadsheet'. *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1977, pp. 209–10.

—— *Tada ir mes: Liaškai iš Australijos*, Vilnius, Tyto Alba, 2001.

Kouvaros, George. 'Ithaka, or the Open Voyage: Jonas Mekas' *Lost, Lost, Lost* and *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*', *Screening the Past*, 2016, www.screeningthepast.com/2016/12/ithaka-or-the-open-voyage-jonas-mekas-lost-lost-lost-and-reminiscences-of-a-journey-to-lithuania/.

Mekas, Jonas. *There is No Ithaca: Idylls of Semeniskiai & Reminiscences*, translated by Vyt Bakaitis, New York, Black Thistle Press, 1996.

Olubas, Brigitta. 'The Nostalgia of Others: The Construction of the White Migrant in some 1990s Australian Multicultural Texts'. *Negotiating Diversity: Aspects of Identity in Anglophone Culture / Die Verfalt des Anderen: Aspekte englischsprachiger kultureller Identitäten*, edited by Peter Drexler and Andrea Kinsky-Ehritt, Berlin, Trafo Verlag, 2003, pp. 149–64.

Persian, Jayne. *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2017.

Silbajoris, Rimvydas. 'The "Reminiscences" of Jonas Mekas: Poetic Form and Rooted Sorrow', *The Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1973, pp. 327–34.

10

Antigone Kefala: Of Journeys, Songs and Stories

Konstandina Dounis

I have been dancing to the rhythm of Antigone Kefala's words for over thirty years now. Indeed, I remember distinctly the first poem that I read – not in a journal or some other publication, but passed on to me with a few others by writer and visual artist Peter Lyssiotis:

> We travelled in old ships
> with small decaying hearts
> rode on the giant beast
> uncertain
> remembered other voyages
> and the black depths
> each day we feasted on the past
> friends watching over

the furniture of generations
dolphins no longer followed us
we were in alien waters (*Absence* 37)

My colleague Helen Nickas and I would later use this poem – in the early 1990s – as the introductory piece to our bilingual anthology of Greek-Australian women writers, *Retelling the Tale* (1994). In the early 1980s, however, it was a revelation. I was entranced at how *familiar* it was: we, the second generation along the Greek diasporic chain, had internalised this alternative narrative all our young lives of the inauspicious arrival of our parents on old decaying ships. In my parents' case specifically, the ship was so old that it later sank, thereby entering community mythology as yet another example of the entrenched self-other definitions instigated by the immediate postwar government to ensure cultural and linguistic exclusion (2–3). I was also entranced at how *unfamiliar* it was having this story narrated in the English language by a writer whose name signalled her Greek ancestry. At that time, any other poems I had been privy to by writers of Greek background writing in Australia had been written in the Greek language. Although in English, this poem had a cadence that set it apart from the writers – primarily male – that I had been studying at university. Furthermore, it spoke of negotiations with the past, a past characterised by other displacements, of friendships severed through geographical distance, keepsakes instigating memory relegated to an uncertain fate, and an allusion to the cognisance of what was to come. I'd never read anything like it and felt quietly proud that I was part of a culturally and linguistically marginalised community that could produce a work of art like that.

A few years later, in 1986, another milestone: the department of Greek Language and Culture Studies at RMIT in Melbourne convened the first conference devoted exclusively to Greek-Australian literature: 'Greek-Australian Literature, Literature in the Making'. The writers reviewed in the course of the conference

papers wrote primarily in Greek, and most of the academics expressed their findings in Greek as well. The pervading milieu was unquestionably male-centred. I was one of the speakers at this conference and was considered a bit of an oddity because of my comparative youth and, of course, my gender. It was a well-attended event initiating much dissension.

The points of audible contention, as I recall them, were as follows: that this literature is Greek literature which happens to be written outside the Greek state; and that the term Greek-Australian literature is an affront to Hellenism. Others preferred the appellation 'Australian Greek', in that they deemed it important that 'Australian' be an epithet, assuming a position of subordination to the noun 'Greek'. Nikos Papastergiadis, then an emerging second-generation Greek-Australian academic, accepted the salience of referring to this body of work as 'Greek-Australian literature', but perceived the hyphen to be its most significant feature (149). George Papaellinas, one of the first second-generation writers to emerge in the early 1980s, insisted that all writing written in Australia, irrespective of initial language used, was Australian (18). In hindsight, I now realise how fortunate I was to have been in attendance at an event where critiques of literary canons and diasporic notions of interconnectedness intersected in such palpable form, with writers and academics contesting the appropriateness of terminologies with which to collectively frame this literary phenomenon.

It is hardly surprising that it was around this time that certain ground-breaking anthologies emerged from the Greek-Australian community: George Kanarakis' *Greek Voices in Australia* (1987) and Thanasis Spilias and Stavros Messinis' *Reflections* (1988). Although both publications were justifiably met with resounding approval, some concerns were later raised at the paucity of women's writing included within them. And so, these first-generation Greek-Australian women writers were invisible in mainstream literary circles and silenced in their own community, a complex amalgam of shadows ensuring their absence.

Fortunately, feminist ideology was also entering our sphere of reference, with Sneja Gunew its most exciting and articulate exponent within the realm of immigrant women's literature. In 1988 Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin edited an anthology titled *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing*, dedicated to Lolo Houbein, Antigone Kefala and Anna Couani, the latter two of whom had a Greek cultural connection; all of whom were described as pioneers in the field. The book is prefaced by a section of the poem 'Thirsty Weather' by Antigone Kefala, which clearly inspired the anthology's title: 'To find our measure exactly / not the echo of other voices' (v). The introduction was succinct from the outset:

> This anthology offers *some* women, writing from a diversity of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, a place from which to speak and be heard. Its making is an act of positive discrimination. 'Positive discrimination' … has developed, in the last decade or so, into a powerful strategy of confrontation and resistance to racial and gender bias and inequity in every aspect of our society, including the public arenas of writing, publishing and reading. (xiv–xv)

I credit Sneja Gunew with inspiring my convening of the 1992 RMIT conference on Greek-Australian women's writing, *From Sapfo to Sappho* (she was the keynote speaker), which attracted over a hundred women writers from all over Australia, as well as the anthology of Greek-Australian women's writing, *Retelling the Tale*. Both initiatives dispelled, once and for all, the myth that there were negligible numbers of first-generation Greek-Australian women writers hence their omission from community anthologies and journals. I had compelling evidence now that aesthetic value is, indeed, not universal, that it does not simply reside in the text, but is also historically and culturally specific. I also saw in luminous detail the power of 'collectivity', in this case generated by the framework of Greek-Australian women's writing, that informs every facet of feminist politics and practice.

After a hiatus of about ten years, during which time I raised my daughter, I returned to carry out doctoral studies in Greek-Australian literature. My research was very much within the tradition of literary studies and focused on first- and second-generation poets, one of whom was Antigone Kefala. I now realise how much of my research then was numerically driven: the desire to attain numbers, to prove existence, to attain gender balances.

And then, a year into my doctorate, tragedy struck. My mother and father were going to go on a holiday to Greece. Their suitcases were packed and I was going to drive them to the airport. My mother was only a little older than I am now and was in good health. She suffered a massive heart attack in her sleep and could not be revived. The shift in my universe was so resounding that I refer to life as 'before' and 'after' my mother's passing. It wasn't just that I lost my mother; I realised that there were so many stories that I would now never hear or know, so many recipes that I would never learn, so many rituals that I would never master. Sneja Gunew pinpointed my devastation with absolute precision:

> The maternal figure, perhaps even more so in cultures of exile, represents an archive of the past, as well as being the fragile repository of an affective life forged in a new environment. Once this is removed it is as though a structural prop, a load-bearing wall, has been kicked away. ('We, the Only Witness' 215)

I went back to my doctorate after a couple of years and started to gravitate more and more to female writers, so fascinated was I by the stories they were telling and the hidden experiences they were recounting. Almost imperceptibly, I was now amassing a serious archive of Greek-Australian women's publications – which graced the end of my doctorate as a comprehensive bibliography of several hundred works – as well as unpublished works, together with a substantial dossier of translated poetry and prose that entailed painstakingly worked and reworked literary (as opposed

to the expediency of literal) translation that I further subjected to the refinement that cultural translation affords. Hodge and Mishra's 'the intervention of the uncanonised' became a sort of conceptual mantra (203). There would be no entering the Australian canon unless these linguistically marginalised works could be translated first. I realise now that I was slowly but surely moving away from 'literary studies' to 'cultural studies' or, as Gunew points out in her recent book, *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators*, 'curriculum work on what were then known simply as "migrant writers" was grounded more easily in interdisciplinary cultural studies because this writing made sense only within the history and politics of post-war migration' (116).

And that's when the realisation hit me. It was so stark that I was incredulous that I had not noticed this before. No wonder I felt such desolation at my mother's passing. There was nothing to validate that she had even been here in the first place, nothing that documented her vital contribution to Australia's postwar mass-migratory wave. Her story was marked by absence – her story and those of the thousands upon thousands of other young women, haunted by their homeland's postwar decimation and the demands of the constrictive dowry system, who travelled to the other ends of the earth in the hope of a better life; women who worked as hard if not harder than their male counterparts to establish homes, businesses and community organisations.

Greek-Australian women's writings provide a much-needed corrective to official Australian history. However, I would contend equally that they provide a much-needed corrective to local histories written from and about the Greek-Australian diaspora. In *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory*, Nancy J. Peterson outlines the crucial role that minority literatures play in bringing minority histories into full cultural consciousness. The writers of these works 'live and work at a cultural moment when minority histories are not known in their complexity and so they strive in their literary works to draw the past into the present moment of the reader's

consciousness' so that we 'seize hold of historical memories' (12). Her extensive reviewing of four minority women writing in America today highlights that 'in attempting to narrate the lives, experiences and events of their people, these writers have found themselves taking on the role of historian alongside that of writer' (3). American poet and activist Adrienne Rich gave expression to this absence of women's experience from written discourse, constantly highlighting the imperative of women writing women's lives, hauntingly crystallised in the ending to her poem 'Diving into the Wreck' – a book of myths / in which / our names do not appear (*Fact of a Doorframe* 103). She asserted that minority women's writings, through calling attention to what has been 'previously undocumented or forgotten, are a vital means of resisting amnesia' (qtd in Peterson 3). On the other side of the world, Antigone Kefala, enshrouded within a multiplicity of margins, in the 1960s and 1970s in particular, was quietly and persistently preoccupied with the same quest:

> what if … we forgot who we are
> became lost in this absence
> emptied of memory
> we, the only witness of ourselves (*Absence* 104)

Manfred Jurgensen was clearly receptive to this when he noted in his review of *The Island* that, 'this work is as far removed from documentation as possible, yet in the final analysis it tells us a great deal more about the anger, frustrations, conflicts and sufferings of migration than any number of documentary accounts' (232). James Clifford pinpoints a central tension in diasporic consciousness, the essence of which radiates around the centrality of the experience of work:

> Diasporic consciousness makes the best of a bad situation. Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation

> and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (215)

The literary outpourings of Greek-Australian women writers constitute a rich source of material, varied and complex enough to radiate a multifaceted portrait, a vital mirror image. Rather than black-clad objects of derision or the semiotic signposts of folkloric curiosities, Antigone Kefala's prose and poetry have collectively given us a glorious mosaic of women's images. In 'The First Journey', there is a wonderful portrait of Aunt Sofia, a delicate minutia, offering a glimpse of the innate capabilities of these women from Europe's rural areas, thousands upon thousands of whom made their way to foreign lands, transplanting their talents with them:

> Aunt Sofia … was full of stories, complaints, prices, neighbours, children, news, frocks. One imagined that she would have started a household in the middle of an empty field with the bombs dropping from everywhere, and would have produced a tradition of cooking, of living, of making a myth of it in no time. She had warm brown eyes, with copper tinges, and neat plump hands, very well kept and her table manners were elegant. (12)

Consider this lyrical piece about Angheliki, who hailed from Smyrna:

> It was a pleasure to watch her going about the world arranging and cleaning, leaving behind her a trail of windows through which the sun shone more brilliantly, golden yellow tables, freshly baked bread, her mind unclouded with self-pity. (23)

Songs and music hailing from other landscapes and other linguistic/literary traditions permeate the prose throughout, drawing attention to the power of writing to illuminate and record that which would otherwise be relegated to the precinct of 'amnesia'. Or, to paraphrase Gunew's insightful commentary, 'the writing more so than the song enables stories to live on and create a pedagogical tool that renders this history legible' (*Post-Multicultural Writers* 75). Consider the following passage:

> Then Michael called out that I should sing something. Sing, sing, they all cried, one of those foreign songs. So I sang the old ballad that I had heard on that boat for the first time, sung by those strong-faced men, burnt by the sun and marked by the salty air, their eyes washed out clean. The ballad about the sea and the black clad mothers. Of sons and lovers lured away by the black beauty covered in white lace, the sorceress with the bewitching heart. Of the roads of forgetfulness that went deeper and deeper, taking away the mind's landscape, and the signs, and the return journey an unmapped dream. (*The Island* 78)

In *The Island* there are constant references to a number of older women who populate Marina's cultural landscape, one of the most evocatively drawn being that of her beloved Aunt Niki. The subtleties of her mannerisms and features are exquisitely delineated, the mutually conceived admiration forming an undercurrent throughout the narrative:

> I launched enthusiastically, for I loved to talk, and Aunt Niki liked me, admired me as something out of the ordinary, as if she recognised in me things that she considered of value, giving me scope to do things and say things that she would not give to others. I felt at home with her, yet sometimes with a slight, but very slight foreignness towards myself, so that as I talked I watched myself from the corner of my eye to see if the

> finishing touches were aesthetic enough. For Aunt Niki loved decorum, the living decorum of one's life that must be kept always cultivated, polished so that one could move gracefully among centuries of stylised gestures. (40)

The following passage is one that I have always immensely liked – indeed, I don't recall ever publishing an article on Greek-Australian literature without finding a spot to quote it. It warms my heart because it presents a snapshot of our mothers and our aunts as we, the second-generation daughters, remembered them as being and not as some media stereotype portrays them. These courageous women, who migrated here in the fifties and sixties, worked extremely hard both at work and at home. They also had innate style, and their dexterity with the sewing machine meant that on the countless Saturday evening and Sunday outings they always looked beautiful:

> I was in high spirits. Professor Stevens had liked the essay, minus A, full of complimentary remarks in the margins. I could see in Dinos' face that I was beautiful tonight. I felt well in Aunt Niki's black velvet coat, an adventurous woman going out for the evening with a man. I moved down the aisle between the seats and laughed. Beautiful and foreign I could feel it in their eyes. Dinos followed, full of solicitude, as if escorting a celebrity. (69)

The female persona intricately threads its way throughout Antigone Kefala's oeuvre; however, nowhere is it embodied as pervasively and memorably as within the figure of the mother. Even before 'Conversations with Mother', published in 2002 within *Summer Visit*, the close bond between mother and daughter was a pervasive thematic preoccupation. My cognisance of it was rendered more overt upon revisiting Kefala's writings subsequent to the passing of my own beloved mother. In *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*, the protagonist's mother is depicted as a woman of

refinement and erudition, the terse language highlighting the indignity of her labouring in a factory:

> Alexia's mother was sent to work in a pyjama factory. Mother was a Resigned Person with long, elegant hands. She had been beautiful when young and very timid, and at home had spent a great deal of her time reading novels – Russian and French, Italian and Spanish, Greek and Roumanian, English and American, Scandinavian and Finnish, Hungarian and Bulgarian, of which she talked at length to Alexia, and of the sadness of life. (12)

Antigone Kefala's tone oscillates between a pathos generated through deep affinity with the plight of her fellow immigrants and a penchant for irony rendered possible through the detachment of standing outside the host society's margins. In the now famous passage from *Alexia,* set in the postwar period, firmly informed by Castles and Miller's 'other' definition (34–5), Miss Prudence has invited a group of young girls to tea. She asks them if they're happy, sending Alexia into a panic:

> For she felt happy to be an Enormous Word, a word full of flamboyant colours, which only people who had reached an ecstatic state had a right to use. She saw it as the 'apotheosis' so to speak, of a series of events, which as far as she could see lay totally outside her life.
>
> The more she thought about it the more confused she became.
> Did Miss Prudence mean:
> Was she happy eating her mashed potatoes?
> Being in her house with the grandfather clock chiming?
> Happy living on the Island?
> There she was, with the saltcellar in her hand which she had been asked to pass on to Mary, not knowing what to say, getting more and more confused between Happiness and Salt. (44–6)

The above excerpt affirms Vrasidas Karalis' notion of Kefala belonging 'to the trans-national literary movement which started after World War II, aspiring to dismantle the grand rhetorical tropes, systems and narratives' (255). It further reflects the assertion of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin that 'whether written from monoglossic, diglossic, or polyglossic cultures, postcolonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of "English" by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood' (50).

Antigone Kefala's poetry and prose can be appraised within a multitude of frameworks: Greek-Australian Literature, Australian Literature, Diasporic Literature, Women's Literature, Global Literature. In 2012 she was formally recognised at the inaugural Antipodes Writers' Festival for her contribution to Greek-Australian letters. In 2018 she was similarly recognised by the Greek-Australian Cultural League. She is, at last, enjoying recognition within Australian canonical frameworks: in 2017 reeiving the Queensland Literary Award for Poetry – the Judith Wright Calanthe Award – for her collection, *Fragments*; as well as being shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry. No less important was the conference *New Australian Modernities: Antigone Kefala and Australian Migrant Aesthetics*, which gave rise to this essay. In the 1980s immigrant writers were part of a parallel universe, their inclusion in a conference organised by the Association for the Study of Australian Literature an unthinkable possibility.

The richness and nuanced essence of Antigone Kefala's words give rise to disparate and exciting interpretations that alternately deem her writing autobiographical through to its perception as being a paean to the intricacy of artifice. However, irrespective of critical perspective, its effect on *me* – a bilingual/bicultural reader and critic – is unequivocal. To paraphrase Gayle Greene's lovely summation, it lights the way 'back to my mother's garden' (300), it illuminates the pathway through a kaleidoscopic portrayal of postwar immigrant women imbued with colour and exquisite texture.

Works cited

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London and New York, Routledge, 2002.

Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Clifford, James. 'Diasporas'. *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*, edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 1999, pp. 215–42.

Dounis, Konstandina, editor. *Greek Women Writers from Sapfo to Sappho*, Melbourne, RMIT University Press, 1994.

—— *Poems for My Mother*, Melbourne, Olive Grove Press, 2009.

—— 'Conversations with Antigone Kefala'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 234–44.

—— 'The Shadow and the Muse: Journeys within the Thematic Tapestry inherent in Greek-Australian Women's Writing', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 2018.

Greene, Gayle. 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory'. *Signs*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1991, pp. 290–321.

Dounis, Konstandina, and Helen Nickas. *Antipodes Writers Festival, 15th-17th June 2012: Festival Program*, Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria, 2012.

Gunew, Sneja. 'We, the only witness of ourselves: Re-reading Antigone Kefala's work'. Karalis and Nickas, 2013, pp. 210–20.

—— *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan mediators*, London, Anthem, 2017.

Gunew, Sneja, and Jan Mahyuddin, editors. *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988.

Hodge, Bob, and Vijay Mishra. *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1991.

Jurgensen, Manfred. 'On The Island'. *Outrider*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984, p. 232.

Kanarakis, George, editor. *Greek Voices in Australia: A Tradition of Prose, Poetry and Drama*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1987.

Karalis, Vrasidas and Helen Nickas, editors. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, Brighton, Owl Press, 2013.

Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*, Sydney, John Ferguson, 1984.

—— *The Island*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1984.

—— *Absence*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1992.

—— *Summer Visit*, Artarmon, Giramondo, 2002.

Nickas, Helen and Konstandina Dounis, editors. *Retelling the Tale*: *Poetry and Prose by Greek-Australian Women Writers*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 1994.

Papaellinas, George. 'Australia in the Eye of the Beholder'. *Outrider*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1989, p. 18.

Papastergiadis, Nikos. 'The Journeys Within: Migration and Identity in Greek-Australian Literature'. Gunew and Longley, 1992, p. 149–61.

Peterson, Nancy J. *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Rich, Adrienne. *The Fact of a Doorframe*, New York, Norton, 2002.

Spilias, Thanasis and Stavros Messinis, editors. *Reflections: Selected Works from Greek-Australian Literature*, Melbourne, Elikia Books, 1988.

11

Feeling for Time for Antigone Kefala's *Fragments*

Efi Hatzimanolis

Antigone Kefala's work spans decades; it is some of the sparest and most eloquent writing about what it means to be a woman writer traversing the cultural institutions of writing and publishing in this country. This essay focuses on *Fragments*, her long-awaited and much anticipated collection of poetry, almost twenty years in the writing and published in 2016. As its title suggests, *Fragments* is replete with poems that address the fragmentation of human life – her own and others – across various physical and psychic landscapes that are themselves in the process of erosion. In representing the immediacy and specificity of everyday encounters, the poems succeed in metaphorically subjecting time – in the sense of the time of reading the poetry together with our aesthetic appreciation of its formal techniques – to both its suspension and its decay.

My own introduction to Antigone's work was in the early 1970s, when I stumbled across a short piece published in the weekend edition of *The Australian*. My memory of that dense, tiny dot of a poem is of how in reading it I felt suspended somewhere between 'here' and another temporality, which seemed both familiar and unrecognisable to me. Its cultural significance in being published in *The Australian* was not lost on me, especially as a second-generation Australian schoolgirl of Greek heritage who had never read anything by any immigrant writer. Voices like Antigone Kefala's were rarely heard in Australia's cultural institutions at that time. They would circulate as fragments, scattered here and there. For me, the title of the collection *Fragments* alone evokes this wider sense of the history of immigrant women's writing over the past forty years, which includes the struggles to speak from within the major cultural institutions and, in doing so, to be heard as carrying the poetic authority often attributed to groups other than those of postwar immigrants.

In her early prose, Antigone Kefala traced the conjoined question of identity and genre in representing the institutional forces that informed her writing as an immigrant woman. However, identity as such was never represented by her as a singular subject position from which she could only be heard to speak as an immigrant, commonly understood as an object for sociological enquiry. Her work has always been keenly aware of how the reception of immigrant writing in this country has tended to erase the plurality of immigrant identity as it is formed through traversing and mediating specifically literary forms of subjectivity.

Fragments, similarly, poses questions for me about the adequacy of poetic forms in representing a culturally hybrid identity such as Kefala's, particularly alongside the prevailing views of identity as something that fits securely and seamlessly into everyday life and that continuously arises out of a transparently traditional past. Her textual practice is more than capable of providing a fragmented and dislocating representation of identity. Moreover, her poetry's preoccupation with fragmentation works as a

condition of speaking poetically precisely as a disruptive partial presence, to use Homi Bhabha's definition of the hybrid. For Kefala, the haunting presence of the past that reappears in her poetry and prose lies in the spaces and time of repetition itself, where it is released through her fondness for uncanny imagery and lyrical rhythms.

In tracing the force of her cultural identity, which also persists in the trajectories of her memories, the poems do indeed offer creative solace to daily life. However, memory and culture also enter into her poetry as the very material that is itself subject to decay, and in this sense, the collection's focus on how identity is irrevocably fragmented over time is grafted onto the experience of aging as an immigrant woman writer. Such writing about the fears and desires that accrue in one's store of memories over time and multiple cultural displacements, only to be released unexpectedly further down the track in old age, foregrounds the disjunctions between past and present, which, put simply, are not overcome in looking to the future.

The collection is acutely aware of how memories are about the power of the past in assaulting one, and, as a consequence, splintering the sense of a unified self in the present, almost as a dramatic psychic dislocation of time from space and also within the time of the poet/subject herself. Her interest in the personal and cultural ruptures between past and present, time and space, shares many of the concerns of Australian modernism, especially in terms of modernism's preoccupation with cultural homes for the diversity of new voices in Australian literary production. If anything, *Fragments* construes being at home culturally not as a question about 'belonging' to a place of departure or arrival so much as becoming haunted in and by her new homes of culture as much as by her old. In this sense, the poetic voice of *Fragments* is attuned to the local landscapes, which Kefala describes as resonating with the silence that overrides Australia's disavowed white colonial and immigrant histories of dispossession, including her own partial presence in this literary environment.

The opening poem of the collection, 'The Voice', introduces this preoccupation with time not only as personal history or memory; it also establishes a sense of her poetry's complicity with the splintering effects and affects of memory on the individual, particularly memories that are neither sought nor valorised by the poet, but which nonetheless speak for her. Most obviously, the poem represents the dramatic moment of a shock of recognition, a voice from her past that triggers unwelcome memories:

> At the sound
> I turned
> my veins full of ice
> that travelled
> at high speed
> releasing fire.

Suddenly unsafe in the familiar surroundings of the present, simultaneously frozen and intensely self-aware, this injection of menace from the past turns the poet into the target of time itself – she is frozen. Yes, this is a poem about a bad unbidden memory that is triggered upon hearing a familiar voice, but it's also about memory's irresistible and possessive force. In a flash, this voice, which is significantly described as 'the sound', is also *of the poem,* arising out of the drama of the very moment it is created as a subject for the poem. It is in this sense, then, that her recognition of the disembodied sound as a voice from her past works also as a form of self-recognition – and it is that which I think makes her a poet of subjectivity.

Moreover, the dramatic speed with which this unwelcome memory ambushes the poet, threatening a type of annihilation in destroying her peace of mind, points to the vulnerability of the self, in particular, to the memories that may splinter self-awareness, thus exposing her to the experience of a force that is more than capable of dislocating the present moment, in an instant. I'm also thinking here of how individual identity is multiplied by one's

memories so that the self no longer feels like a discrete repository of past experiences collected over time and in familiar spaces, somehow firmly grounded in the present. The voice from the past in and of this poem takes that sense of poetic subjectivity, which may seem fully self-aware and transparent to itself, as its departure point. It does not, however, supersede it.

And nor does the future offer solace to the aging poet, for it is quite literally faceless – that is to say, devoid of any traces of self-recognition; memories quite simply do not extend back from there. Nonetheless, there is always a sense of being on the threshold of sense in encountering the opacity and materiality of poetic language and cultural identity, even when, or perhaps most especially when, it is a clarity that is 'light … clean as if made of bones', to use an image from the ensuing poem in the collection, 'Letter II'. Here, the persistence of feelings of loss and grief are being eroded imperceptibly by the natural forces of decay. The quality of light itself is made clean in such a way that it clarifies the poet's perception of death, loss and memory as the coincident erosion of material surfaces. This poetic clarity of vision is not the sole penetrating insight into the nature of personal loss for the aging poet. It also mediates and continues the work of decay from within the material form of the poem itself precisely through and as the spare poetic expression of that erasure when even her sense of loss itself appears to be disappearing.

> The light today
> Clean as if made of bones
> Dried by a desert wind
> Fell in the distance on the roofs
> And I remembered you.

What is most poignant about this poem's representation of bereavement is the redoubling of loss that is barely spoken but, nonetheless, delicately registered in the images of how the intense memories, the feelings, may fade over time, even in their

return. This, however, is no compensation for her loss, because 'Nothing will bring you back'. (The negative logic of 'the loss of the loss' just doesn't work like that.) The final line, 'And I remembered you', implicitly suggests its opposite – the forgetting out of which the poem's memory arises, and the entropy laying waste to memory.

Compensation for loss, when it is felt, is felt paradoxically. In 'On the Bus', the poet has recourse to the moment, but in the instant of recognising the present moment, the now of the present, she also recognises its commensurate, fleeting nature. She feels herself suspended in this linear progress of moments that succeed one another, but she is also inexorably moving towards her own (bus) stop, which is the moment of her own stopping in death. 'On the Bus' I think exemplifies this idea of being suspended not just within a moment but also within the erosion of time. Its apprehension in the poem is a moment of recognition that coincides inseparably with the loss of the moment.

From being transported in a state of temporary suspension to being transported joyously by aesthetic experience, Kefala's poetry is also about the affect of movement, of being moved not only from one space to another, but between states of mind that correspond with death and life. In the final poem, 'metro cello', she plays on ideas of ascending and descending. The cello music emanating from the underground, as if from a tomb, is a musical movement implicitly likened to that of Persephone's return, measuring the energising albeit temporary force of aesthetic forms against the natural force of death. Indeed, this measure's temporary nature is addressed in a number of the poems, not always so positively. In 'Poem for Chitra', for example, Kefala speaks to her dead friend and former fellow writer, Chitra Fernandez:

> Our friends are listening
> In the darkness of the theatre
> holding themselves
> in their emaciated bodies

exposed faces that have acquired
the look of adolescence.

The physical fragility of the human body described here so movingly also suggests the tragic uselessness in attempting to counter nature's force by identifying with art:

they live vicariously
briefly forget
the fatal prophecies.

The implication is that the poet is one who does not forget 'the fatal prophecies'; that she moves within them in a measured manner so as not to appear pitiful. And indeed, Kefala's poetry does carry a sense of fatalism as a distancing affect, one that seems to work aesthetically and psychically in forestalling self-pity and enabling a dignified stance in the face of aging and the inevitability of death. Talking to the dead about the living, 'our friends', behind their backs suggests precisely that movement into the acceptance of the decay at work in everyday life and also in art.

But lived experience without recourse to the means of adequately representing it may itself be a type of death, 'a great forgetfulness', as it is in the poem 'Diviner II', which addresses the pressure of time and distance on refugees' memory:

Obsessed with the great depths
could not find other measures
watching the waters in the evening
you traced the way
a great forgetfulness.

Sometimes, a 'great forgetfulness' is the only appropriate approach in mediating the experience of unfathomable pain, if only because it seems commensurate with great suffering but

without the risk of reliving the trauma. The cost, however, is for the refugee to be left with only traces of memory, disconnected from one's cultural identity and unable to articulate how and why one's dislocation matters, let alone be heard. Kefala doesn't speak for refugees; she does not take on the accent of the other in this poem, even though she herself was first a refugee from Romania, and then an immigrant to New Zealand and finally to Australia. Rather, the poem suggests something of the contradictions and differences between the representation of experience and lived experience, especially in the context of refugees who can neither return to their homeland nor speak easily of their past, a past that continues to haunt them in the process of becoming an unspeakable place in the present, simply a trace.

Other poems, however, draw on her immediate physical surroundings to create a sense of time's passing from within the timelessness of poetic inspiration. In 'Noon' the clarity and concentration of the language plays with how our attention is distracted, grabbed and then shifted, moving our perspective from the ground up into the imagination. The simple opening lines: 'Only a lizard / riding the dry leaves' suggest that there is nothing special going on here, but they are, of course, a dry introduction to the ensuing lines about fluidity, about the ascending and descending qualities of poetry, its power to move us, to touch us, through its admixture of musicality and tactile imagery:

> such silk, that fell
> and rose, heavily,
> singing through the air.

At the heart of this gem, in the proximity of poetry to the motility of the senses, the stirring of the senses, lies waste – there it is again, inescapably, in the sound of the 'dry leaves' wherein lies the 'fatal prophecy' of the poem, and indeed of the collection. Ascending and descending in time much like aging or music

itself, the poet's (moving) breath structures the poem's affect of loss as an extended song, which also hints at the final expiration.

Fragments includes many fine poems that create a memorable sense of place in the Australian landscape – indeed there are poems that are almost elegiac in their compassionate view of the fragility of the land and others that are wryly observed commentaries on the splashy-splashy displays of ironic sophistication that is Sydney's summer arts festival atmosphere. From these I offer, by way of conclusion, a reading of 'The Ringbarked Trees', a poem from the second section, which is entitled, somewhat ironically, 'First Encounter'. Here, the poetry returns to the repetitions that mark the nature of the persistence of the past in her work. Time is not anchored in the sequential or the timeless but is represented as an energy that is depleted through waiting, which is seen in the landscape that has been laid waste by it. Its enervating affect is more akin to an unsettling gothic return of the repressed, whereby the violence of an original rupture is returned in the poem as something that is at once in the process of reappearing, as if stuck in the scene of the traumatic event, and also eroding perceptibly.

The haunting opening line of 'The Ringbarked Trees' positions the reader in their first encounter with just such a return, alerting us to the condition of possibility of the poem itself: 'They came in the evening'. This is a striking insertion of Australian history into the poetic time of the evening without, however, becoming an allegorically drawn moral tale about that history's content. 'They' here refers to the dead stands of the ringbarked native forests, which have been robbed of their time through the programmatic violence of state-sanctioned deforestation. Note that the tree ring is a measure of trees' time, and that they have been killed in a way that recalls the line from an earlier poem, 'Memory', published in *European Notebook*: 'They steal my time'. In 'reanimating' the dead trees in the time of the poem, Kefala en/counters the ongoing effects of white colonialism clearly mediating an environmentalist discourse together with Australian discourses of identity politics and Aboriginal histories of struggle:

their maimed arms rigid
the movement that had stretched
towards the sky cut off with
a sword of fire.

The arresting rhythm of the first stanza together with its imagery of arrested movement is nothing short of a masterful representation of a rupture in time, almost mythic in its reference to 'a sword of fire'. While the living presence of the trees alone appears as the senseless excuse for the war waged on the environment, their skeletons serve as a reminder of the inescapable entropy at the heart of life. The poem moves between these two distinct albeit inextricably connected times, the contextual political time of histories and the time of entropy – from the image of 'rigid' to the final cut of the sword in the first stanza to the images of 'scattered', 'eerie', 'alone', 'silence', 'fall', 'lie', 'eroding' and 'ashes' in the second stanza. The spare imagist structure of the first stanza is superseded by the more descriptive, delicately touching imagery, including the simile 'like sea horses, skeletons', in the second stanza, as if to foreground the pity of loss that accompanies the processes by which waste accumulates in the world just as it also piles up in poetry, in particular, in the second stanza's 'excess' of imagery before entropy finally reduces the whole lot to 'ashes'.

Abandoned, exposed, made even more vulnerable to the senselessly eroding repetition of 'mornings and nights', the 'scattered army' in its wasteland reappears not as witness to the utter uselessness of the annihilation inflicted through politically motivated nation building, particularly in the postwar period of mass migration and resettlement. Rather, the poet's encounter with the wasteland, a landscape bereft of its own time, produces a compensatory affect of tenderness, which is a familiar affect in much of her work. It's a tenderness for the other, generated in the grief for the irretrievable loss of the time of the other. Australia's failure to accommodate cultural differences precisely at the time

it was working institutionally in clearing cultural and physical spaces for itself as a postwar nation coincides with its discursive inability to hear precisely the tenderness for the other in Kefala's poetry as the immigrant's desire to love Australia.

Works cited

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994.

Kefala, Antigone. *European Notebook*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988.

—— *Fragments*, Artarmon, Giramondo, 2016.

Karalis, Vrasidas and Helen Nickas, editors. *Antigone Kefala: A Writer's Journey*, Brighton, Owl Publishing, 2013.

12

In-between Lives: *The Island* and *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*

Jane Gibian

In Antigone Kefala's novella *The Island*, the protagonist Melina observes ironically that most New Zealanders spend Sundays mowing their lawns:

> trimming it, shearing it, with machines, by hand, stubbornly trying to keep it to that fanatic short-haired green carpet. A consistent war was being waged, a war to the death, this desperation in their hearts not to be annihilated by grass. (2)

Melina's description is full of the ironic distance and distortions of scale often deployed by characters in Kefala's novellas and children's book *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*, who achieve positions of strength through having an outsider perspective on society. These texts complicate the ambiguous cultural and

literary dynamic of colonial societies at a point of social change. The works evade strict generic boundaries, hovering between short fiction and novella, with an obvious poetic influence. Kefala's writing often challenges the essentialist notion of the 'migrant life' and the migration story, as well as the biographical female narrative. The largely female characters are frequently situated in-between others – as young migrants not closely wedded to their parents' culture, but obviously different to the majority culture in an Anglo-Celtic society like New Zealand or Australia. They are in-between languages as well as culture, learning English at a faster rate than their older relatives, but not yet fluent speakers. As young females in a post–World War II society, they experience discrimination and assumptions about their potential. In *The Island* and *Alexia*, the protagonists gain a privileged perspective on both mainstream society and their own cultural background, and Kefala's writing shines a light on identity as something not fixed but shifting and movable.

Kefala's novellas *The Island* and 'The First Journey' both deal with displacement and emotional development for the young protagonists. Her later novellas published in *Summer Visit* (2002) concern adult characters. *The Island* in particular can be read as a Bildungsroman with a distinctly female perspective (Brett 133). The protagonist of *The Island*, Melina, is a young woman at university in a country like New Zealand, who migrated as a child with her family from Europe. Throughout the book Melina tries out different roles, grappling with what it means to be a woman, a person from a non-Anglo culture, and a young adult in this particular unnamed society. Kefala's narrator is intense, hopeful and passionate, looking forward to the future. Her independence and drive are at times hindered by social values, especially those that structure influential institutions like the university. She is seen as an exotic oddity by both academics and many students, one who talks in an unreserved, expressive manner. Kefala highlights the gulf that must be negotiated between addresser and addressee, something often taken for granted in a monolingual culture. In

Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures, the young Alexia finds it difficult to speak with her classmates not only because of the limits of spoken language, but also because of the way 'they all talked with their lips only, not with their eyes, their faces or their hands' (24).

An integral part of Melina's sense of displacement is due to her position in-between that of her older relatives, such as her mother and aunt, and that of other young New Zealanders. Whilst deeply embedded in her original culture and sympathetic to its people, she does not feel an irresistible pull towards the past. The unnamed war, presumably World War II, arrived just after Melina was born, putting an end to the old life that is continually invoked by her family. She is physically and mentally detached from the frequent discussions between Aunt Niki and Loula, both widows, crying over their sorrows (Nickas 115). Melina is impatient with the 'cult of suffering' bound up in the church that confines widows and other adults to perpetual guilt and repentance. On the contrary, Melina refuses this sacrifice: 'I had not fallen from Paradise. I had been born free. I wanted us all to revolt' (*The Island* 31). This marks a strong departure, and here she displays little nostalgia. The past is, however, a very powerful myth-like institution that seems to motivate everyone on the Island, not just the most recent migrants: 'all the people in the narrow colony we seemed to move in, all transplanted people who talked constantly of the past, that dashing figure with hot blood in its veins' (14).

The tensions within a largely white British settler/invader culture, along with the country's Indigenous inhabitants and newer migrants from a range of different countries, create a society rife with contradictions and misunderstanding. There is a sense of having to relearn and internalise a 'new' past for the colony. Melina recalls being given the past 'with the air and seasons, as an everyday diet, till it became a sort of a breath that moulded us' (14). The old meanings and myths become less relevant to her as she struggles with this fragmentation of the self. Her family go about performing the expected rituals, attempting

to recapture the atmosphere of Greece, like her Aunt Niki, 'wearing my berets, when no one here wears berets … trying to buy good bread, reading my European authors. I feel I am carrying Europe in me, moving in its rhythm … a Europe that is probably no longer' (73). Aunt Niki carries Europe inside her as one would a child, and is simultaneously a child produced by Europe, in a similar mode to that of Ania Walwicz's narrator in her poem 'europe': 'in me is europe i keep it i got it i get it in me inside me is europe' (71), even as Europe itself changes.

Aunt Niki and Melina also articulate the delicate balancing act between making concessions to the new country of the present and retaining a valid sense of one's self and cultural background. One of the results of this balancing act between cultures is the ability to identify the foibles of the newer society. Kefala denaturalises social mores that are taken for granted, in a way that highlights their sometimes bizarre qualities and reveals much about the values behind such behaviour. In *Alexia*, Alexia's only friend, Basia, makes fun of the New Zealanders' manner of speech, telling Alexia that many years ago everyone on the Island had been forced to swear an oath of silence, and 'to speak only when absolutely forced, and even then to use a minimum of sounds, and if possible only a few, such as "mg," or "ag," which were forever repeated in sorrow, regret, surprise, admiration … and so on' (24).

Alexia imagines there must be a subtle complexity to these minimalist sounds, to which her ear was not attuned. This episode highlights the stark differences between communication styles in expressive and non-expressive cultures. She also notices that the greatest topics of conversation in the New Country are the Weather and the Grass. Several of Kefala's poems satirise social rituals like the barbecue:

> only we in the bald yard,
> with the gum tree
> fanning itself nervously,

eating raw meat laced
with black flies
drinking the parched wind
and making polite conversation
while the light poured on us
sizzling. (*Absence* 7)

As these descriptions reveal, humour is an integral aspect of Kefala's satire of the stultifying Anglo culture of postwar New Zealand (and by implication Australia). The very English, boys' private-school attitude at university is evident in the uncommunicative, heavy boys who come alive only on the well-trimmed sporting fields, yelling hoarsely like animals: 'I stayed there, with that black uninteresting liquid which they called coffee in front of me, the place full of young men with heavy jaws made of iron who could make the silence sink below any imagined level' (*The Island* 23).

The protagonists of *The Island* and *Alexia* measure their relative distance and affiliation across the range of cultures they encounter. Both works feature references to the 'Original people' of the island, the Maori. During Melina's first holiday job, her boss is researching Maori history and has interesting theories about how contemporary society can come to understand its history:

> One needed a type of vision that only people placed at the crossroads could provide. That is, people who lived between cultures, who were forced to live double lives … these he called 'the people in between.' This vision, he maintained, was necessary to the alchemy of cultural understanding. (10)

Melina recognises herself and her family in this description, identifying with the state of 'in-betweenness' felt by the Maori, and wonders if she too has an important vision. She is full of 'longing for unknown things – for open spaces, warm people, the scent of hot stones in the sun' (11). A young Maori captivates

Melina with his awareness of the past, referring to his relatives as 'his bones' and talking of the past as something immediate to him.

Through her position in-between cultures, Melina has a sense of self that is at times blurred or spilt. Sometimes she observes herself as a subject from outside:

> Aunt Niki liked me, admired me as something out of the ordinary, as if she recognised in me things that she considered of value … I felt at home with her, yet sometimes with a slight, but very slight foreignness towards myself, so that as I talked I watched myself from the corner of my eye to see if the finishing touches were aesthetic enough. (40)

Melina's sexual and emotional development are central to *The Island*, especially through her relationship with Dinos. He is also a migrant, and she is attracted to what she sees as his similar displacement from the dominant culture. At times Melina is drawn into a patriarchal construction of femininity, looking at herself as being looked at by men, and like the scene above, feeling a sense of the foreign in herself: 'I felt so unfamiliar, as if my old, plain self had suddenly been replaced by a very daring, sensual version that excited me with its foreignness. It was as if my image in his eyes came back to possess me, to obsess me' (50). Despite internalising the male gaze to an extent, she also gains some empowerment from these different recognitions of her complexity and potential.

Dinos becomes increasingly arrogant and sexist as they socialise with others at a restaurant. With anger and sadness, Melina realises that despite his similar experience as a cultural outsider, the affinity she felt with him excludes gendered differences:

> I had nothing to do with him and with his hunting game. He seemed to imagine me an easy prey … I wanted to go home. The place was suffocating with an implied menace. I watched

> him drink another glass, till his gestures became more and more extravagant, his entire vocabulary against me, women, as a game that had to be won, to be discarded, to be enjoyed. (71)

Melina experiments with these different roles, exploring her new role as a woman, and being disappointed by attitudes to her as a migrant and a female. This sense of split subjectivity allows her to sample various roles and play with conventions, in a way that has similarities to Kefala's stylistic experiments with genre. Hints of the poetic infiltrate this novella in many passages of evocative imagery, such as when Melina and Dinos leave a party as dawn breaks, the sea still dark:

> And then above the line of the clouds an enormous orange disk emerged. It stood there suspended for what seemed to be an interminable time and then as if turning, light streamed out of it, incandescent light gushed across the waters, flowed like fine strands of hair … I felt that the past had been so small, so narrow, so mean. This morning it seemed to me that the earth contained only riches, riches which were offered so nobly … This is what we were trying to reach, in our innermost hearts, this slow burning of all the opaqueness in our bones, till we became transparent like the light. (51–2)

Dream-like sequences inhabiting the past are also notable in Kefala's poetry, for instance in 'Labyrinth':

> The coolness of fountains
> a dream
> in these streets of stale dust.
> The past dripping soot
> through the latticed windows. (*Absence* 43)

Like Melina, the younger protagonist in *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures* explores her place in a new country with many

social and cultural differences. This narrative operates on several analytical levels. It has a timeless fairytale feel, opening with 'Once upon a time, yet not so long ago, in a large island in the South Pacific … there lived a girl called Alexia' (1). In the voice of the child, Kefala capitalises many nouns, underscoring those seeming to be of most significance to the newly arrived child learning English. The work is difficult to place in a strict generic category; although ostensibly a children's book, *Alexia* features an ironic tone that is at times strongly critical, and it definitely appeals to the adult reader. It also features illustrations throughout, creating a text that sits in-between established genres. Kefala suggests that the book is not widely known because people are unsure what to make of it – *Alexia* does not fit neatly into the categories of either a children's book or adult fiction (Nickas 229). As Michelle Tsokos notes, Kefala identifies herself as both an Australian writer and a migrant writer, rejecting the limitation imposed by a single role (51).

Utilising the perspective of a child allows Kefala another critical position that is especially effective in making ironic a social situation. The legitimate naivety of a child's observations of the adult world result in a privileged perspective on the foolishness of adult society, and in this case are enhanced by Alexia's different cultural perspective. Alexia and her family are refugees from the last great war and have been brought to the New Country, the Island, by 'the Charity of the World in order to Work' (*The Island* 8). Alexia's family are transported from an elevated middle-class culture in which people read in multiple languages, play music and go to the theatre, into the New Zealand working-class where they are resigned to repetitive work in a match factory (her father) and a pyjama factory (her mother), while her older brother is sent to make roads. The emphasis on music is particularly striking, as among the few belongings brought with them are their instruments, which are lovingly personified as members of the family. Alexia's father rushes home from the factory every day to play his violins, compose music and write his memoirs.

A central focus of the tale is language, especially through Alexia's experience of learning English. At a special dinner, Alexia's teacher asks if she is happy:

> Alexia immediately went into a panic. For she felt Happy to be an Enormous Word, a word full of flamboyant colours, which only people who had reached an ecstatic state had a right to use … The more she thought about it, the more confused she became. Did Miss Prudence mean:
>
> Was she happy eating her mashed potatoes? …
> Happy living on the Island?
>
> or
>
> Happy living in the World?
> There she was, with the salt-cellar in her hand which she had been asked to pass on to Mary, not knowing what to say, getting more and more confused between Happiness and Salt. (43–5)

Alexia's response is both comic and illuminating; she does not take for granted the meaning of supposedly straightforward words. She is daily made aware of how language constructs one's sense of reality, and how various languages differ in their version of reality. Her observations here cross over into philosophical discourse, questioning the nature of being and reality. Struggling with the New Language, Alexia notices that it is freer than the other languages she knew,

> where each part had to adjust continuously, insistently and precisely to each other … But here the Pronouns and the Nouns, the Adjectives and the Verbs, had given up adjusting to one another, but took each other as they came, and seemed none the worst for it'. (46)

The tale ends on a positive note as Alexia and her friend Basia enrol at the University on the Hill (though it lacks a Great Hall and a Quadrangle with a Tree), with Alexia emphasising the power of language despite its difficulties: 'Language, she felt was more potent, inventive and durable than people imagined, and produced daily miracles that no one noticed any longer and everyone took for granted' (47). It is almost a happy ending, certainly an evocative one for the potential of language and writing, especially for the multilingual young woman. Despite the difficulties of Alexia's and Melina's dislocated positions in-between cultures, their advantage is a privileged perspective on diverse cultures and ways of living. The older Melina, in particular, moves through feelings of despair, excitement and hope as she negotiates her life as a young woman, a migrant and an individual. Viewed through a framework of that which is in-between – between cultures, between genres, between different versions of the self – both *The Island* and *Alexia* unfurl multiple possibilities for the expression of the gendered, imaginative and literary self.

Works cited

Brett, Judith. 'The Process of Becoming: Antigone Kefala's *The First Journey and the Island*'. *Meanjin*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1985, pp. 125–33.

Kefala, Antigone. *The First Journey*, Sydney, Wild & Woolley, 1975.

—— *Alexia: A Tale of Two Cultures*, Sydney, John Ferguson, 1984.

—— *The Island*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1984.

—— *Absence: New and Selected Poems*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1992.

—— *Summer Visit: Three Novellas*, Artarmon, Giramondo Publishing, 2002.

Nickas, H. *Migrant Daughters: The Female Voice in Greek-Australian Prose Fiction*, Melbourne, Owl Publishing, 1992.

Tsokos, Michelle. 'Memory and Absence: The Poetry of Antigone Kefala'. *Westerly*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1994, pp. 51–60.

Walwicz, Ania. *Boat*, North Ryde, Sirius, 1989.

13

Antigone Kefala and the Accented Voice in Australian Poetry

Ivor Indyk

Given the diversity of voices that have followed Antigone Kefala's into Australian poetry in recent times, it is interesting to ask what voice brings to our poetry, and how it is recognised in terms of accent, grammar, prosody, word choice and even line lengths. Aptly, Kefala's most recent poetry collection, *Fragments* (2016), begins with a poem called 'The Voice' in which the voice in question is hardly registered – it is simply referred to as 'the sound' – though the consequences of hearing it are huge.

> At the sound
> I turned
> my veins full of ice
> that travelled

at high speed
releasing fire. (*Fragments* 3)

Although the voice that is heard is not specified, the voice implicit in the poem immediately marks it out as a Kefala poem. In part, this is because of its minimalism, evident in the short lines, which throw emphasis on syllables that are usually barely audible in English – as in the second line 'I turned', where the temptation to linger on the final syllable (or indeed to make it a syllable) in relation to the rhythm of the longer first line is all the greater because of the half-rhyme carried from 'sound' in the first line to 'turned' in the second. There is a similar, and expanded, emphasis on the final syllable ending in 'd' in the fourth and fifth lines, 'that travelled / at high speed'. Overall, it is the energies invoked and barely contained in the clipped lines that seem to carry the poet's voice.

This is apparent, again, in the paratactic accumulation of detail, which in its progression of intense effects, ending in an explosion of emotional energy – 'veins full of ice / that travelled / at high speed / releasing fire' – draws attention away from 'the sound' that caused it altogether. Within the paratactic progression, there is the mixture of modalities that is also characteristic of Kefala – liquid to solid to gas, ice into fire, immobility into speed.

In other words, it is here, in the formal features of Kefala's poetry, that one locates its distinctive voice – the voice has been subsumed into its effects, which is precisely where it is to be found, not in the utterance of a particular speaker. The effacement of the speaker is all the more remarkable in the second stanza of the poem, which comes back to 'the sound', now referred to in even more abstract terms, at least to begin with, as 'this return':

This return
the past attacking
unexpectedly
in the familiar streets. (*Fragments* 3)

It is of course a cliché to invoke the voice of the past, but the past in this stanza is no echo chamber, it is a wild animal. The play on 'turn' in the first stanza and 'return' in the second has the past coming back like a smack in the face, or like an ambush. The returning sound is no speaker's voice either, but the vehicle of an immense power, which leaves the 'I' of the poem completely without agency, an object rather than a subject, defenceless prey in the face of the past's aggression.

The sudden irruption of an impersonal or primitive power in the midst of a settled reality is also a characteristic of Kefala's poetry, amplified by the brevity and understatement of her prosody. The 'I' that observes in the poem knows its vulnerability – that is what makes its observations so acute. But what really captures one's attention in this second stanza is the disturbance, not in reality, but in the contours of language, brought about by the minimalism of Kefala's line. To have 'unexpectedly' as a one-word line hard upon 'the past attacking', forces one to break 'unexpectedly' into its five syllables, so as to give both lines something like an equal emphasis. It's not really possible to say 'unexpectedly' quickly here: one is pushed towards 'un-ex-pect-ed-ly', as if each syllable in the word had its own weight and integrity.

There is a similar effect in the poem 'Travelling' (*Fragments* 24), which begins, 'We drove out of the city / the car sizzling / the traffic / maddened by the heat', where the unexpected appearance of 'sizzling' throws emphasis on the first syllable with its double 'zz'. This is difficult to pronounce if you are going to do justice to the 'i' at the centre of the syllable, as a speaker with great respect for the language – a non-native speaker for example – might be tempted to do. Kefala has used 'sizzling' before, in an earlier (1988) poem 'Barbecue', which depicts a backyard lunch at the height of summer:

> eating raw meat laced
> with black flies
> drinking the parched wind

and making polite conversation
while the light poured on us
sizzling. (*Absence* 89)

Here, too, you have the synaesthetic shift in modalities (in this case the liquefaction of light), the sense of the people involved as subject to larger forces (like barbecued meat, in fact), and the defamiliarisation of language caused by the play of rhythms across the final single-word line. All contribute to heighten the strangeness of 'sizzling' – the foreignness of its pronunciation one might say, as indeed the commentators have said in criticising Kefala's poetry as somehow un-English, or still worse, un-Australian. Kefala already had three languages – Romanian, French and Greek – before she came to English, so she is well aware of the weight of words and their energies, and is expert in mobilising them.

These aspects of Kefala's voice are very apparent in a later poem in *Fragments*, 'Day by Day':

Another spring
the peach tree in flower again
unerringly.
On the lawns
their neck feathers green
shimmering in the sunlight
the pigeons coo, restless
assiduously tapping the earth. (*Fragments* 75)

There is an admonition implicit in 'unerringly', its four syllables attenuated in relation to the eight syllables of the previous line. The object of the admonition can only be human beings, errant in their ways by comparison with the regularities of nature. It is present again in the description of the pigeons, whose feathers are also in a sense flowering ('shimmering in the sunlight'), and who, for all their restlessness, 'assiduously' tap the earth. 'Unerringly' /

'assiduously' – the only two adverbs in the poem echo each other, express a commitment which, by implication, may not be felt by the observer, who had set out, after all, by noting drily, 'Another spring …'

Then comes the second stanza, again marked by a turn, as in 'The Voice' – a double turn in fact, now foregrounding the voice that had been subsumed in the first stanza of the poem by the observation of detail and the management of the line.

> Backwards we turn
> we turn backwards
> measure our failures
> with infinite patience
> re-imagine the times. (*Fragments* 75)

But what kind of voice is this? It is certainly not that of an individual – indeed, with its plural and generalised 'we', and its rhetorical use of chiasmus ('Backwards we turn / we turn backwards'), it is best described as a choric voice, enigmatic in its wisdom, but pointed in its morality. And the lesson? Like the peach tree, like the pigeons, we too are unerring in our regularities, assiduously picking over our failures – though unlike them, backward- rather than forward-looking in our anxieties. This is a severe comparison if you ignore the possibility of humour in the implied analogy, which portrays humans as backwards-turning pigeons, and the import of the last two lines, which suggest that the patient measuring of past failures may be a virtue, in the sense that it leads to a re-imagining of the times – surely a future-looking perspective. When the two stanzas of the poem are brought together again, the result is both an effacement of the poetic voice, its absorption in the observation of detail, and its magnification, as it suddenly becomes the expressive medium for a collective point of view, and a hugely expanded moral perspective.

The first-person plural is a protean presence in Kefala's poetry. It can, as here, suggest the human in general – an existential

condition. The earlier poem 'Coming Home' (1978) has this larger reference, though it also implies a more specific perspective:

> What if
> getting out of the bus
> in these abandoned suburbs
> pale under the street lights
> what if, as we stepped down
> we forgot who we are (*Absence* 104)

The 'we' here suggests those who are displaced, whose identities are only uneasily anchored by memory and place, and who therefore might find themselves abandoned in the unpeopled expanse of an Australian suburb:

> we, the only witness of ourselves
> before whom
> shall the drama be enacted? (*Absence* 104)

Again, it is important to pay attention to the texture of the language. Should that not be 'we, the only witness*es* of ourselves'? As it stands, the 'we' is plural and at the same time singular, an 'I' expanded to 'we' by the existential intensity of isolation. It is that underlying sense of isolation – or rather, the speed with which the sense of isolation can become dominant – that drives the larger identification in the choric 'we'.

It is tempting to attribute the displacement of the 'I' into 'we' to the experience of migration, a triple migration in Kefala's case, from Romania to Greece, from Greece to New Zealand, from New Zealand to Australia. Certainly, Kefala's early poems set 'we' – the tenuous community of migrants and refugees – against the 'they' of officialdom and the adopted country, as in 'The Place', and in 'The Promised Land', set in New Zealand:

> In time
> the rain closed in on us
> the night like a black liquid
> we fell in it
> travelled down through the oil
> drained of resonance
> while they drank it away
> in the tiled tombs
> with the wingless birds on the walls
> heraldic birds, with long monkey hair
> and blind eyes. (*Absence* 40)

This dichotomy between 'I' or 'we' and 'they' is also strong in *Sydney Journals*, where it may be felt most strongly precisely in relation to the issue of voice:

> The restaurant austere-looking but the food quite good. Everyone discussing work, new positions, possibilities. Yet it seemed that none of them had heard someone with a different accent for some time. They were listening to me politely, with an increased amount of attention, as if I were an invalid, so that the air became charged while I spoke. (*Sydney Journals* 6)

Indeed the more insistently 'they' is invoked, the greater the assertiveness of the 'we':

> They had left this trial packet of laundry powder in the letterbox. They described it in powerful terms – oxygen bleach, stains removed, dazzling whites …
> They are still at their fifties best, selling us this elusive quality of 'whiteness' that they still think, women, 'housewives' are constantly dreaming of. So behind the times. They don't realise that none of us gives a fig about whiteness – whiter than white – this metaphysical position, accessible, one imagines, to God only. (*Sydney Journals* 19)

But, as these quotes suggest, the 'we' has a range of applications. It can be a generalisation of the vulnerable 'I'; more specifically, the 'we' may be family (in memory especially); or the small community of like-minded people (not exclusively of migrant background) to which Kefala belongs, commemorated in *Sydney Journals*; or, more broadly, the kind of people whom 'they' regard as foreign, or strange, or threatening. It is never entirely clear how many are to be numbered amongst the 'we' on any particular occasion, and that is the power of this mode of address – it has a shifting range of reference, larger or smaller as the situation, or the poet's rhetorical stance, requires.

On the other hand, there is the opposite tendency in Kefala's poetry, already noted, away from identification, towards effacement and absorption. This movement is dramatised in 'Summer at Derveni', which begins with 'we' only to make it disappear:

> We sink in light
> disappear in silence
> nothing but
> the slow folding of the sea. (*Fragments* 27)

This is immediately followed by a paratactic sequence, the accumulation of detail in abbreviated lines – almost a list – typical of Kefala's attentive mode:

> Afternoon heat
> empty of voices
> on the foil surface
> heads drifting
> like heavy ornaments
>
> At dusk
> the fishing boats
> massive dark stones

planted
in a field of moonstone. (*Fragments* 27)

Now 'empty of voices', the scene presents in intensely visual terms. The effects are remarkable, both for their synaesthesia, and for their surrealism. Upon the foil surface of the waters of the Gulf of Corinth heads drift – the heads of swimmers presumably – as if they had been decapitated. The actual analogy – to heavy ornaments – elaborates on the metallic surface of the waters, as if the heads were ornaments on a shield, and brings with it classical resonances. A similar transformation in the final stanza turns the fishing boats that come out at dusk into massive stones (because it is suspended, time has passed with remarkable rapidity from noon or early afternoon in the first stanza to dusk in the third). Stone upon stone – for the metallic foil of the water under the afternoon heat has now turned into the opalescence of moonstone in the twilight. This petrification into stone also has classical resonances, most obviously with Medusa and the Gorgons – it was the head of a Gorgon that ornamented the shield of Athena. The voice might have been absorbed into the details, but the perspective they afford is distinctively Kefala's.

I think of this as *resonance*, the quality of Kefala's voice that persists even when voice has been subsumed in the observation of detail. It resides in the transformations brought about suddenly by synaesthesia, as in the poem 'Noon' where the mixing of sensory modalities is intensified once again by the brevity of Kefala's line:

Only a lizard
riding the dry leaves.
Up, in the blue depth
a bird cut with its wings
the light
such silk, that fell
and rose, heavily,
singing through the air (*Fragments* 22)

Implicit in the title is a reference to classical pastoral – it is precisely at noon in this traditional genre that individuality drops away, and the human is absorbed into the natural world. I like the jolt in 'Up, in the blue depth', given that depth usually goes hand in hand with 'down': it's a little disorientation that heralds the more spectacular one that follows, when light becomes cloth cut by the bird's wing, and the sky is full of folds of silk, rising and falling, 'singing through the air'. Light to matter to song – a triple transformation. The singing could come from the bird, or the folds of silk – equally, given the tradition, it might suggest the singing of cicadas at noon, though they are not mentioned in the poem. But whichever way you take it, the singing belongs to the scene; it is an expression of what I would call its *resonance*.

There is an even simpler example of resonance, not in terms of sound but in terms of colour, in the poem 'Bowls Player':

> All in white
> she escapes day by day
> not to be consumed
> in the house
> by his death (*Fragments* 77).

On its own, the white attire worn by a bowls-player is unremarkable – it is a common domestic occurrence. But in this context, framed in terms of the woman's escape from a voracious death lurking everywhere in her house, the colour white takes on a range of symbolic references. The otherwise ordinariness of the scene – underlined by the factual iteration of the lines – heightens the symbolic resonance. There is an earlier (1992) poem by Kefala, 'Ceremony', which plays on the white dress of the bride – 'She came up the stairs / in the thin white dress / with flowers in her hair, / unseeing / splashing through / the milky afternoon' (*Absence* 141). The woman dressed in white in 'Bowls

Player' is also in a sense a bride, fleeing the clutches of death. First death took the husband, now it is after the wife.

It only requires a little amplification of the resonance for the effect to become surreal, and to take the poem into the realm of fairytale, dream or hallucination. The description of the old woman waiting on a couch in 'Birthday Party' draws on a similarly ordinary scene, possibly in a nursing home – but her diminution, and the magnification of her glasses, combine to make the ordinary suddenly seem spellbound:

> She was waiting on the couch
> very pale, white dusted
> incredibly small now
> folding inwardly
> not coping with her glasses
> that had grown to a giant size (*Fragments* 67)

I experienced this with my mother in her old age, the way that, as her eyesight deteriorated, and the lenses in her glasses became thicker and thicker, the magnification of her glasses made her eyes seem enormous. It gave her the innocent wide-eyed stare of a young child. The 'we' in the poem declares itself 'unnerved / by this transformation', and this applies not only to the helplessness of the old woman, but to the dramatic insubordination of the objects she depends on, rebellious in the face of her weakened agency.

Kefala's poems have a much stronger sense of the proximity of death than is usual in Australian poetry. Consequently, visitors from death's realm appear with some frequency in her poetry, particularly in dreams. In the poem called 'Dreams', the poet is visited by a ghostly familiar in a long silk dress – her smile reveals her teeth to be cut in crystal, her diamond eyes flash in the night. Incredibly, the poet asks – presumably because of the ghost's hauteur – 'Was she pleased to be back?' In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case, as the poem reveals – that it is the poet

who has passed, by some strange transformation, into the land of the dead. Together they enter 'the old house' they had known in the past, which is filled with a silver light.

> As we came in
> someone was plucking
> at an aluminium sound.
> The wooden floors had gone
> and now we walked on glass
> below
> a mass of naked crabs
> and chickens, all packed in
> a moving floor of sallow flesh. (*Fragments* 13)

The synaesthesia (metal becomes sound) marks the passage into what quickly becomes a nightmarish reality, with the naked crabs – without their shells one imagines, and therefore sharing the sallow flesh of the chickens – packed together and moving under the glass beneath their feet. Then comes the coda:

> How come? I said
> before we had clean water.
> Your fear, she said
> changing the place. (*Fragments* 13)

One admires the civility of this couple, who can converse with equanimity and curiosity in the midst of a nightmare. This brings the fantasy back to earth. The departed has come to offer wise counsel. It is the younger woman's fear that has curdled the clear water and turned it into the writhing flesh of crabs and chickens. It is emotion that has created these extraordinary effects – a powerful emotion, but familiar nevertheless.

This is an important point. The resonance I am referring to, whether of voice or image, carries an emotional burden. It isn't simply a matter of accent or influence, not just a signature

or mark of identification. For all her minimalism, Kefala is an expressionist, who often works at maximum intensity. There is a sequence, 'Nights', from her 1992 collection, *Absence*, that gives four scenarios haunted by the prospect of death. It is the third poem in the sequence that I remember most, for its leap into surreal expressionism. The first three stanzas have their first and fourth lines in common – the intensification occurs within this frame in variations in their second and third lines, and then with a variation only in the third line:

> You had come out of the house,
> in the silent street
> were riding on a trolley.
> The night full of menace.
>
> You had come out of the house,
> the white bear
> was waiting on the chimney.
> The night was full of menace.
>
> You had come out of the house,
> the white bear
> was howling at the moon.
> The night full of menace.
>
> Then it leapt… (*Absence* 111)

Like the poet in 'Dreams', one might ask: where did the white bear come from? It is clearly an embodiment of the menace the night is full of. But it also dispels the menace in its leap, for at that point everything vanishes.

There is a similar poem in *Fragments*, 'Moon Wolf', in which the watching full moon, 'transparent olive green / floating in the dark sea / above my head', suddenly swoops down:

a bird now
its hollowed eyes
pencilled in crimson
its incandescent tail
a white light
searing through the air
around me, closing in
burning the ground.
At my feet, the white wolf
the tense arch of its back
blue phosphorescence. (*Fragments* 33)

The first moon in January is typically called the Wolf Moon in the northern hemisphere. The white bear, the white wolf – these speak to a northern-hemisphere imaginary. Kefala has often noted the influence of French surrealism in Romanian literature – there may be traces of that influence here. But the bird, with its eyes ringed in crimson and its incandescent tail, is surely drawn from the tropics. The title of the poem is not 'Wolf Moon' but 'Moon Wolf', a creature born of the moon and not simply associated with it.

Kefala's expressionism here is complex, both in its figuration and in its colours – the olivine moon, the red and white bird, the phosphorescent blue of the wolf. It is the dynamism of the scene, though, that is the most remarkable – the burst of energy as the moon become bird swoops down, incandescent, 'searing through the air', enveloping the observer and burning the ground around her. Then at her feet, suddenly, a second metamorphosis, bird into wolf, this huge energy contained, given form again, momentarily at least, in the shape of the white wolf, 'the tense arch of its back / blue phosphorescence'. 'Phosphorescence' is one of those polysyllabic words, intensified by the brevity of the line, that Kefala delights in – you can feel the fizz, the effervescence of the blue light, as the syllables in 'phosphorescence' are sounded out. I am reminded of Kenneth Slessor's sound-image at the

end of 'Five Bells': 'waves with diamond quills and combs of light / That arched their mackerel-backs and smacked the sand / In the moon's drench' – also a flaring of energy, an image rich in resonance.

But where the complexity is most felt is in the emotion carried by this burst of energy. The emotion isn't merely the apprehension of menace. It isn't fear only, because the observer isn't overwhelmed. If it is anxiety, it is anxiety intensified to the point of horror – and yet the feeling is more of wonder than horror. There is a sense of election in the spectacle – the observer is watched, 'aimed at', chosen – and when the transfiguration is complete, she has the white wolf at her feet. The emotion, if not tamed, has at least been held, contained within the limits of the poem – much as the white bear in 'Nights' both expresses and banishes the menace in its leap.

Works cited

Kefala, Antigone. *Absence: New and Selected Poems*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1998 (1992).

—— *Sydney Journals*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2008.

—— *Fragments*, Sydney, Giramondo, 2016.

Acknowledgements

Antigone Kefala: New Australian Modernities began as a two-day symposium at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in May 2019 in connection with the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. The symposium brought together writers and academics as well as readers, admirers and friends of Antigone Kefala with the aim of acknowledging her extraordinary writing and its significance both in the Australian literary field and beyond it. In addition to the program of papers, the event included a panel of writers and poets: Evelyn Araluen, Anna Couani, Angelo Loukakis and Ellen Van Neerven, each of whom read from Antigone's work and from their own.

We would like to thank the sponsors of this event: the School of the Arts and Media at UNSW, which also supported the publication of this collection, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature and the Copyright Agency through their Cultural Fund. We also wish to acknowledge with thanks the support from UNSW Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (now Arts, Design, Architecture) through the Distinguished Visitor Program bringing Sneja Gunew to Sydney for the symposium and other wonderful events. Finally, we want to thank Terri-ann White, formerly of University of Western Australia Publishing (UWAP) and now at Upswell, who had the vision to commit to this important work. We also thank Kate Pickard and the team at UWAP for their assistance and professionalism and for mindfulness re the schedule of the collection so that it is published to coincide with Antigone's birthday.

Index