

Ruin: Essays in Exile Living

Adrienne Kalfopoulou

Red Hen Press (Sep 9, 2014)

Softcover \$15.95 (208pp)

978-1-59709-537-2

This study of exile reinvents the meaning of “home” and sheds light on how humanity defines separateness—from people, from places, from truth.

There are many reasons a people may find themselves exiled, and not all of the reasons have to do with physical removal from a familiar location. In Adrienne Kalfopoulou's *Ruin*, exile is explored through all of the senses as a very intimate relationship between geography, history, and community. There are displacements that happen between generations, and new worlds are formed after significant events. People who die suddenly leave behind a world of people who live on differently without them. Security and trust were globally changed after the events of 9/11. These subtleties of exilic living are densely woven together in personal and illuminating reflections that demand attentive reading.

Kalfopoulou exposes vulnerability in her relationships, her insecurities and disillusionments that translate into a vast loneliness at times. She writes admiringly of her grandmother, who “carried her own rootedness within herself,” and of her parents, who emigrated to America for a better life and never understood why Kalfopoulou settled in Greece. Through her daughter, a college freshman in New York City, Kalfopoulou experiences the gregarious and independent power of the millennial generation and the heartache of no longer being physically present in her life.

The most powerful exploration of exile may in fact be the indifference, intolerance, and injustice of what history has done to the modern world. Whether discussing Scotland, Greece, New York, an airport, bank, or subway, Kalfopoulou manages to expose ways humanity creates its own estrangement. Policies and prejudices formed in response to fear of each other, and all the modern connectivity that makes a divide seem even larger, are illustrated through Kalfopoulou's delicate web of observations about the TSA, Skyping, and the media. Although, for all of the separateness and exploration of that which has hardened humanity and reinterpreted “home,” Kalfopoulou seems to be reaching out to those who suffer with her—those who may also be living in exile and wanting to belong.

Kalfopoulou has spent many years as a teacher, and this is evident throughout *Ruin* by the success of her organization and research and the prose-like nature of some of her more fragmented vignettes or essays. The result is so many little shards of broken time for the reader to piece together. Appropriately, one of her most astute observations is that “anyone who says they will tell you a whole story is already in the midst of a fabrication.”

SARA BUDZIK (Winter 2015)

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