

Cultural Daily

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Rising Star: Review of Impossible Thirst by Kathryn de Lancellotti

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Wednesday, August 5th, 2020

I don't want to have sex with you, / don't want to make your bed. Go ahead and call me a whore ("Not to the Father Will I Give Myself").

What if your current situation were truly scary—if you were involved in a “fight or flight” crisis—do you know how you'd react? Would you be filled with adrenaline and ready to fight? Or would you be frozen with fear?

The speaker in Kathryn de Lancellotti's debut poetry chapbook *Impossible Thirst* (Moon Tide Press 2020) is a brave single mother and unabashed feminist who writes poems fiery hot from contact with her inner warrior. In 23 intense and intensely lyrical poems, Kathryn de Lancellotti examines the patriarchy, motherhood, and her own body—always remaining true to her fiercely feminist stance.

Kathryn de Lancellotti's writing is on fire. Parts of it are similar in tone and effect to the anthem-like characteristics of Maya Angelou's iconic poem “Still I Rise,” in which Angelou's speaker taunts and defies her oppressors, ending with these lines:

I rise
I rise
I rise

—language having the effect of making the words seem to rise up out of the page.

In the poem “Things We Do,” de Lancellotti's speaker describes the inherent violence against women involved in some cultural practices. She talks about foot-binding, clitorectomies, the rape of a child, and even the request made by God in The Old Testament demanding that Isaac's first-born replace the lamb being sacrificed to Him. The speaker explains that she doesn't want or need the type of god that a capitalist would approve of, a traditional patriarchal god. Instead:

I want a God who is an artist,
a woman, a man. One who labors
and bleeds, suckles on the afterbirth

I want God to walk down
the golden staircase
for a taste
of this delicious hell.

(“What God Is”)

De Lancellotti’s speaker’s passionate commitment to feminism seems unwavering, although frustrations still abound. She reminds us that many of our society’s patriarchal beliefs and practices remain in place despite feminism’s successful contributions to the dialog about some issues. She compares the patriarchy to an edifice like Notre Dame Cathedral that periodically sustains fire damage, while its core remains strong (“Notre Dame Was on Fire, but Found Structurally Sound”).

De Lancellotti’s speaker also challenges her oppressors in a self-confident, sassy way. Responding to the poem “Sex Without Love” by Sharon Olds, the defiant speaker says, “I fucked Professor on my period / I fucked Father on the church pew” (The Boot”). In other poems, De Lancellotti’s speaker calls out the existing power structure by reciting all the things she will no longer tolerate, for example, “I will not drop bombs, Sir, will not build walls.” She takes a number of vows:

No longer will I give myself to bearded musicians
nor salty surfers. Touch myself instead.

I will not treat Earth the way you treat the feminine.
will not pour oil into oceans, starve the sacred
polar bear, nor steal ivory from an elephant’s face.

(“Not to the Father Will I Give Myself”)

The speaker is, among other things, a single mother who’s faced with bringing up her son alone. The speaker adores her son and is fiercely protective of him. She describes her son:

The First Time

my son walked he ran into the ocean.
I think he was trying to go home
or at least someplace closer.

(“The First Time”)


When it comes to the speaker’s son, no mother could be more tender. She confesses:

...I lie in bed awake and listen
to my son’s breathing
...with no choice
but wings
and piercing light

(“These Walls”)

The speaker sometimes compares her circumstances to those of Sylvia Plath, who was the mother of small children, married to a man (British poet Ted Hughes) who apparently cheated on Plath and

neglected their children—to the point where, famously and sadly, Plath committed suicide by sticking her head in a gas oven (“The Boot”). Kathryn de Lancellotti’s speaker wisely avoids sharing very many details of her own baby’s father’s negative behavior, opting instead to look at how the situation of single mothers can be seen as universal. She says: “Aren’t we all looking for a way out of the owl’s talons?” (“A Daughter’s Grief”).

 The chapbook *Impossible Thirst* by Kathryn de Lancellotti is ambitious, but doesn’t disappoint. These poems are uplifting to read, and I wouldn’t be surprised if, similar to the words at the end of Angelou’s “Still I Rise,” some of the words in de Lancellotti’s book seem to leap out of the pages, they’re so fiery. Those of us who are tired of dealing with the existing social structure will find encouragement here in how de Lancellotti’s speaker keeps fighting, no matter how many times the oppressor tries to put her down.

After all, as she says in “Not to the Father Will I Give Myself,” “You’ve been hurt, too, little brother / told to take off your sunflower dress.”

If and when The Apocalypse comes, I want my “sister” Kathryn De Lancellotti by my side. Meanwhile, I highly recommend you read this book. It just might “light your fire.”

Impossible Thirst is available on [Amazon](#).

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