**BODILY FICTIONS**

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**Patras Athanasios (1563201700150)**

Reading “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” by Audre Lorde shouldn’t have affected me much. It is not really saying something all that original to my ears but then I look at the date and realise that this was written back in 1984, and although I grew up in the 90s and still think of that decade as “a couple years ago” I can’t argue with the truth: it is 2020 now. So this essay was written 36 years ago and still rings true 100%. On the one hand, there is some comfort in finding things to relate to with people so far removed from you – both literally and metaphorically, the author of this text is a black lesbian woman writing this back in the America of the 80s before I was even born– but it can also feel a little unsettling when it dawns on you that although progress has been made to some extent, we are still living in dark times where countries of the supposedly humanitarian and progressive European Union ban abortion (i.e. they are infringing on a woman’s right to be in control of her own body), prosecute gay and transgendered people, and many other atrocities which seem lifted off of an apocalyptic sci-fi novel.

I cannot pretend to think I understand the woman experience. I can try and sympathise, and I do, but I cannot really get what it feels like to be a woman in a patriarchal society. So I will not try to speak for women, they can do that much better without my help. I can relate, however, to the experience of a homosexual growing up in a society who tries to mould them into whatever it thinks they should be.

Lorde wonders whether white women can understand black women and if maybe they don’t even see them as their own. This is how I saw “flamboyant gays” growing up. There was this idea of “you can do whatever you want in your own bedroom, just don’t be too out there” that kept being projected, to the point that you start blaming these “bad gays” for giving off this “bad image” and ruining it all for everyone else. Or you can also think “well, at least I don’t have it that bad, I can hide and go through this unscathed while they get bullied for being out”. You are “passing”. But you are not unscathed, the wounds are there, just not so easily apparent. This is all a very useful mechanism for the oppressor, one that turns gay people against each other, women against each other, minorities against each other while the dominant white straight male stays unbothered. Like, how small is this area on the Venn diagram that I have to fit in in order to be accepted? How many boxes need I check in? Male, straight, butch, tall, successful, strong, not sensitive, white… But instead of everyone who is outside this group coming together and being in unison, we’re turned against each other. “I might be a woman but at least I’m not black. I might be a black man but at least I’m not gay. I might be a gay man but at least I’m not femme.” And so on.

The other thing that “do whatever you want in your bedroom, just don’t rub it in my face” fails to acknowledge is that being gay isn’t only about sex. I can keep my sex life private very easily, thank you very much, but say I’m invited somewhere with a plus one? Say I want to start a family and have children? Say I have to listen to my boss at work spouting homophobic bullshit all day while I’m doing my best not to tear my hair out? It’s not all about sex and keeping it hidden. Like Lorde says, this oppression permeates every second of our everyday lives, so to tell someone “what more do you want?! do your business in private, I don’t care” is unbelievably brazen.

Finally, another thing that resonated with me from this essay was Lorde’s comment about the oppressed person’s “responsibility” to educate the oppressor. Does this go all the way back to the dominant male being such a mummy’s boy that he needs spoonfeeding? Why is it the woman’s responsibility to teach men about sexism, the homosexual’s responsibility to teach about homophobia, the minorities’ responsibility to teach about diversity? I don’t get paid for this, do your own learning! Some days you might be in the mood, and come upon a person like Evelyn Couch who you can tell is on the right path and just needs a little nudge so you do it. But other times you can tell it’s a losing battle so you just want to go on with your day.

**Giannopoulou Foteini (1563201700031)**

First and foremost, *Fried Green Tomatoes* is a comforting book. I recall reading a brief plot summary of the film under the same title as a teenager and not having any interest in watching it. In a way, I am glad I did not watch the movie or read the book at that time, because I believe I would not appreciate what I now consider its core. It is very comforting to me because, through the character of Evelyn, it appeals to what I, and many others I assume, feel when around our mother. Evelyn’s struggles, her growing up in a conservative society, obediently following the norms, building her identity around her family and losing bits of herself as she lost them, her self-sacrifice, her fears, her hopelessness, remind me of my own mother, as well as countless other women of her age and background. For women whose life was predetermined to be spent for the sake of reproduction and tending the elder, with no consideration whatsoever of their own needs and aspirations and no empathy to their pain, what way out is there, especially when, by society’s standards, their duty is accomplished and therefore their life halfway done?

Even though the importance of other issues touched upon in the text, such as homosexuality and racial discrimination, is equally noteworthy, my experiences led me to focus on Evelyn’s storyline in particular. I was also deeply touched by Bordo’s essay for similar reasons: in any manifestation of female oppression she went through, as agoraphobia and eating disorders, I saw a woman I already know and deeply care about, whom I have witnessed myself being torn apart by traumatizing life events and the burden of others’ expectations. In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, the actualities of such issues were showcased with honesty and a sense of relief as a result of Evelyn’s emotional healing combined with Ninny’s flashback snippets, the relationships of the other characters, the wholesome humor and, of course, the role of food as a medium of sharing compassion and solace.

That being said, I did not find the prose outstanding or the characters particularly original or the plot unpredictable or captivating. It was probably besides the writer’s point. *Fried Green Tomatoes* is a beautiful book that is oozing warmth and tenderness, a book that genuinely feels like a hug from one’s grandma, the feel of her wool cardigan, the smell of her cooking in the background, her voice bubbling about tales of old we’ve already heard a million times and so on and so forth. I would like to gift my mother a copy of this book and talk about it over a plate of her homemade food and let her go on and on in conversations I have no interest in but I know she enjoys. I believe this book is successful, if anything, in bringing people together.

**Tsompanaki Eftichia (201800297)**

I “cain’t” really describe how much and how easily Ninny has crept into my heart. I make sure not to read ahead of the assigned pages because I want to keep getting those bits and pieces of her for as long as I can (the same way Evelyn goes back for more I guess). She is the chosen narrator of the intertwined lives of the Threadgood family and the people who go in and out of their lives and she could be thought of more as means to an end than a character in her own right, but it isn’t so, is it? She is a sweet little old lady living in an old folks home, spoon feeding herself the lie –I ’m guessing – that she is going home but to do her justice, she just hasn’t strayed from her life philosophy “living from day to day just doing the best I can and that’s all I can do”. Ninny is charming because she is authentic, she does not polish her thoughts or words, and she tells things as they are in her mind. She has a way about her that is so un-bitter and content, but perhaps this is a privilege of the previous generations who were brought up to blindly believe in a higher power. Perhaps I am mistaken and it really has to do with unshakeable faith in God, people still have this today.

Still though, her being a firm believer it that God does not give a person more than they can handle seems to be the source of her strength and forbearance but reading about her in the year 2020 it makes me a little jealous. It feels like she has discovered the key to an existence that is not always at odds with its essence as seems to be the case with most of us today when the social media bring forth the extent of our loneliness and our unquenchable thirst to feel that we are doing something worthwhile with our lives, but again maybe this is just me and the old-fashioned thinking of someone who was born in the previous century. It feels like I am rambling on, so to get back on track I want to finish off paying my respects to Ninny for being the one who says “there are magnificent beings on this earth posing as humans” (I think the lucky ones among us might have had some sort of otherworldly loved one who embodies that), “you never know what’s in a person’s heart until they’re tested” (and this is an agony that can be a constant companion for ourselves or the ones we choose to place our trust in). Lastly, when a person like Ninny, who has not dwelled on the fact that she was orphaned and had to stay with another family but rather embraced it, the way her new family embraced her, admits that “[she] had to work every day of [her] life to be good” it is no wonder that Evelyn is so charmed by her nor that the stories about Whistle Stop have taken over her reality more so than her own life. All I have to say about her is that she knows a lifeline when she sees it and she grabs hold of it with both hands even at a time when she is flirting with the idea of death.

**Gyftopoulou Vassiliki (1563201700044)**

**“Experiencing Audre Lorde on the big screen”: An analysis of Audre Lorde’s essay and examples of oppression presented in cinema**

In this extract of her essay *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Audre Lorde allows us to get a glimpse of her personal experience living in the US of the late 20th century and serves as a spokesperson for many oppressed people, as she had faced discrimination on the many levels of her multilayered individuality.

As an African-American lesbian woman, the author’s personal identity could often be put at stake, as societal forces categorized females, members of the LGBTQ community and people of color as “less than”.

While reading through the lines, I kept catching myself, stopping mid-sentence and thinking to myself that her descriptions of oppression, in its various forms, seem oddly familiar. And that is, I now realize, not only due to me relating to her as a woman, but also because as a fervent movie-goer and a junkie for good stories, I tend to make connections between phrases or quotes that catch my attention and my favorite films. And I call such moments of epiphany “The Shining”…

**Shining No1: “[…] it is the members of oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap […]”**

In this part of her essay extract, Audre Lorde describes how oppressed individuals take on the unfortunate task of having to prove their humanity, their vulnerability, their right to live dignified, free lives. The ugly truth, moreover, is that they are also brought to the difficult position of correcting others for their misconduct and for not taking into consideration the hardships that sadly often come with oppressed peoples’ reality. And possibly, it never really occurs to the discriminators that perhaps their words or actions are racist, homophobic or sexist, until the “otherness” comes to the rescue and points it out.

Contemplating on these ideas, the movie “Hidden Figures” (2016) popped in my head. This brilliant true story narrates the strife of three female Black mathematicians to survive in the demanding workplace of NASA’s headquarters during the 1960s Space Race, while dealing with racial and gender oppression.

Specifically, in a literally jaw-dropping scene, one of the female mathematicians is questioned by her White boss, in front of all of her coworkers, for the reason she leaves from work 45 minutes a day, not hesitating to humiliate her. When she finally replies that “there’s no bathroom for me here”, even then, no idea crosses his mind about the apparent discrimination. She then proceeds to go off on him, no longer holding back and hiding her emotions, exclaiming and expressing angrily the injustice of the absence of colored bathrooms for over half a mile away and the hardship of having to walk there, in heels and a long skirt, just to relieve herself.

So, just like Audre Lorde, she doesn’t simply deal with oppression as a Black individual; in addition, she has to deal with the sexist and inconsiderate way according to which patriarchy operates. She has to stand up for her rights against her White male boss, who does not bat an eye for the basic human needs of Black people and does not realize the discomfort of the female dress-code and everything it entails. The patriarchal system rests comfortably within him, it is in his best interest. So blind and unaware of his derogatory behavior, he finally stands speechless, astonished and (I believe) embarrassed in front of the truth.

**Shining No2: “[...] violence against Black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured. But these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against Black women.”**

Here, the wise words of Audre Lorde serve as a strong reminder that members of an oppressed community, such as African Americans, have been fighting for so long against the violent acts and hateful conduct of some White members of the US society, and have developed such a powerful bond under circumstances of similar mistreatment, that they tend to forget that violence can live and flourish within their own community. They often turn a blind eye on instances of sexism and homophobia, toxic masculinity and abuse directed from a Black person towards another Black person.

By analyzing this, all I can think about is the movie “Precious” (2009), which perfectly depicts the horrifying truth Lorde preaches about. The film opens with Precious Jones, a 16-year-old Black girl, living in the hood and expecting her second child, after being raped, again, by her own Black father. As the story unfolds, and the father has left the picture and the family, we are left watching Precious strive to survive in a toxic family environment, with an extremely abusive and revengeful mother, who solely blames Precious for her own unhappiness: a mother so abused by the system, left poor and uneducated, that ends up corrupted and constantly refusing to recognize the infuriating injustice in her own household.

At the end of the movie, her words to the social worker at a child welfare institution, in front of her daughter, confirm her disorientation and inability to fight against, or even comprehend, male abuse: “(referring to the abuse against Precious) It’s this bi\*\*\*’s fault. She made him leave”…

**Shining No3: “In certain parts of Africa, small girls are still being sewed shut between their legs to keep them docile and for men’s pleasure.”**

This is neither an exaggeration on behalf of Audre Lorde, nor a tradition dead and gone. This is the tragic reality for many Somalian girls, and for females in other parts of Africa as well. An extremely dangerous, unethical and absolutely horrendous procedure performed on young females, in order to suppress their sexuality and their entire identity. In other words, the involuntary sacrifice of female genitalia on the altar of male pleasure.

Such a terrifying female circumcision is depicted in the movie “Desert Flower” (2009), the real-life story of Waris Dirie, a Somalian immigrant living in London. Dirie, while pursuing a modelling career and desperately trying to make a living in England, is confronted with a harsh truth, when she catches her female English roommate having sex with a man in their apartment. Dirie, knowing that her friend is not married to that man, reacts angrily, confused by what she saw, repeating out load “Only a cut woman is a good woman”, and sadly, not knowing that female circumcision is not a “custom” there or in any other civilized society. Her whole life has been a lie.

**Shining No4: “We have chosen each other and the edge of each others battles. The war is the same. If we lose, someday women’s blood will congeal upon a dead planet. If we win, there is no telling we seek beyond history for a new and more possible meeting”**

In conclusion, these lines from the unpublished poem *Outlines*, which bring a closure to Audre Lorde’s *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*, parallel the message of “The Help” (2011). A wealthy, White, female aspiring author of the South, different in many ways from the Black working class of her town, collaborating with Black female workers, writing down their stories of discrimination, giving them voice through her book pages. Both sides come from completely different social and financial backgrounds, yet both fight their own demons. However, a common goal units them: standing up to injustice, bringing change, silencing patriarchy which doubts their power and talent. In other words, it is a shared battle to bridge the gap and end oppression: a new and more possible meeting.

**Karaiskakis Emmanouil Leandros (1563201700071)**

**On Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One*: From a Woman’s Masturbation to Her Autoeroticism**

Growing up as a man I was constantly reminded of the male sexual organ, the penis. Graffitis, drawings of the male genitalia on the blackboard of the school, engraved on the surface of the classroom’s tables, marked with permanent marker on the door and walls of the halls, everywhere you’d turn there was a penis, in different shapes, sizes and with different captions under it. I never really quite understood if the penis was drawn next to a football team’s logo in order to emphasize on the team’s dominance or its inferiority. The second scenario sounds more appealing since the word “gay” often accompanies the penis and the logo so I hypothesize that there lies a negative connotation behind the gesture –by adding a sexuality to the football team, and of course making it gay, thus “inferior” and “to be ridiculed” in our heteronormative society, maybe it was their way of saying that the team is fucked, or fucked up.

I would really like to comment on the use of the word fuck here. When a man says that he fucked someone he implies that he has put his penis in a woman’s vagina. That’s how men perform sex. They don’t get fucked, they fuck –they don’t have a passive role but an active one. On the other hand we rarely hear women say that they fuck men when wanting to talk about the sexual act. We hear women –the passive role of the sexual act- saying “he fucked me” but not “I fucked him”. Language implies a sexism here that cannot be overlooked. The Greek language especially makes this sexism explicit. In Greek we use the active meaning of the word fuck when we want to talk about something good, e.g. the series fucked= η σειρά γάμησε, and when we want to say that something had a negative effect we use the passive meaning of the word, e.g I’m fucked up at work = γαμήθηκα στην δουλειά. We realize that the way society uses language when it comes to the use of a word that is derived from a sexual act but is used in everyday language, in everyday activities that have nothing to do with sex, makes the societal heteronormative roles of the man and the woman loud and clear, continuing a tradition of sexism from which women have a hard time getting away.

The man performs the active role and that can only lead us to think of the man as the one who does the act and the woman as the one who receives it. So it is implied that although sex is an act that usually consists of two people, there is a dominance in it, making one party more responsible over the other, leaving the second party useless and just a tool for the man to explore and perform his sexuality. But that’s from a man’s perspective. If we look at it from a woman’s point of view, what’s left for her to do in order to explore and perform her sexuality? Receive the man’s favor—if he wants to help her explore it?

Going back to my first argument, I’ve never seen a vagina drawn on any wall, door or blackboard, engraved on the surface of any classroom table, sketched in any book. The only time I’ve seen it is in Biology, when it is ridiculed –alongside the penis, we have to be fair— by the students. They are the forbidden area even though strangely so, since one of the two genitalia is rubbed in our faces since the beginning of our school life.

I got to learn about male masturbation from a very young age and I realized that every boy and every man around me does it. On the contrary I’ve known women who have never touched that area, never engaged in finding pleasure by themselves and to be honest, although I found it shocking, the first time in my teenage years that I got to think of a woman, of the women in my life, masturbating, I got even more shocked. How could they? I mean, how…

Society teaches men to masturbate with one way or another. It’s like the word of mouth, like a rumor that is spread from one boy to the other and before you realize it you touch your penis for the first time because your sexual instincts tell you to and you know exactly what to do. Porn movies end when the man masturbates aggressively in order to ejaculate. So for some reason we know how it’s done; but women have to fight through the stigma in order to explore their sexuality alone, and I’m calling it a stigma because it’s men’s pop culture to talk about porn movies and actresses but as far as I know and witnessed, growing up having almost only female friends, it’s not women’s pop culture. It might be when there’s only two of them in a dark room, under the blanket, when the torch is the only light in their one-in-six-months special sleepover.

Society has a way of concealing women’s sexual identity. It’s like covering their eyes and telling them to not go that way when they’re on the path of understanding their sexual instincts and acting on them without the presence of a man. And somehow at the same time society expects women to be ready to carry a child without sexual education, without sexual information, without teaching them to use sex as a way to find pleasure but rather use it in order to reproduce the species. Irigaray comments on that when she calls religion mythology and talks about mother Mary’s condition and what is connotes: the woman is allowed to be a mother but only a virgin one. “Mythology not long ago assigned this role to her in which she is allowed a certain social power as long as she is reduced […] to sexual impotence”. The same mythology that was written by men is attempting to phallically define women, their presence and power in society, and their presence and power in bed. This can be seen though the most effective dynamics in a woman’s life, that of her family’s. More specifically her father and husband, the dominant males of the family she was born into and the family she creates, trade her sexuality according to Irigaray, and determine its value. Men always had a say in a woman’s marriage since the beginning of time. The father had control of whom would take the girl, the product that had to be polished, look nice, behave appropriately and know everything she needed to know in order to have the potential to be a good wife and her soon-to-be husband checked this values as if he’s checking a catalogue of products and their qualities, trying to see what suits him better in order to create a family. And the woman is left in the side, covered by her life’s dominant males’ “sheath” in order to “protect” her and preserve her value, and sooner or later she comes to identify with her vagina, her only property that’s completely female, which works as another sheath “that surrounds and rubs the penis during coition” as Irigaray describes the sexual act in other words.

What the woman doesn’t understand, or isn’t allowed to understand, is that her vagina is formed as such so that it is completed on its own, without a penis, without the male penetration. “A woman “touches” herself constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so” since her sexual organ consists of two lips that constantly “kiss” and in this way perform an act of autoeroticism. And in my opinion this is her power. Society wants to take their sexuality away from women, constantly degrading them and assigning them a passive role, in coition, in everyday life, even in language. They’re only used as a tool for man to put his “subject” in and do his thing, perform his part, act! But Mother Nature has a different plan, a non-phallocratic one. She puts women in such a position that keeps them always active and never passive. Women are held in control 365 days a year, “making love” to themselves naturally, creating such a bond between them and their vagina, that when a man desires to penetrate, to spread the two lips apart, to keep them distant, feels strange and unfamiliar.

Women have been deprived of their societal rights since the beginning of history, as we know it. Even more importantly, they have been deprived of their sexual rights as well and their sexual freedom. By realizing the power that their own body always held for them, they can pave the way for younger generations of women to come in contact and understand their sexual organ, their vagina and fight for their freedom of being sexually active in a literal and a metaphorical sense.

**Giannopoulou Foteini (1563201700031)**

Deborah Salazar’s essay stood out to me because of how personal it felt and because of how angry and empowered it made me feel. It is not hard to imagine yourself in her place, spread over a medical chair, paralyzed by the tranquilizer, your body’s most sensitive organ exposed to the man whose job is to extract, as smoothly as possible and yet still violently, the life slowly growing inside your guts. How easy is it, however, to remain detached, when you hear people scream, at this moment which is so deeply sensitive, that you are evil incarnate for daring to take control of your body? The writer’s courage is inspiring, a voice much needed on the topic of abortions which is still, about thirty years later, intentionally left obscure, unexplored and covered in shame.

One may wonder: does it really feel like something is growing inside of you when you make the decision for an abortion? For once, it must feel like something’s off. Depending on how long you’ve been pregnant for you might have already experienced some early symptoms: morning sickness, headaches, weakness, the early signs of a symbiosis ready to be established inside the body you were until then well aware was yours and yours only. Is that mere annoyance enough to make you, for the first time, consider giving birth?

Does it really matter if you used protection? Does it take away your right to have an abortion? Salazar had been using protection but had also made the mistake to trust her own body. Her own uterus betrayed her, clinging onto that tiny speck of formless life force while simultaneously leaking blood. The painful irony of this event cannot be ignored; many sexually active and regularly menstruating people, me included, know the relief which accompanies the first ache and the first drops of blood of the month, regardless of whether they have been using protection or not. It is menstruation as the reassurance of an empty uterus which was for Salazar violently cancelled; instead of pain and relief, pain and pain again and no gratification. It is also a bitter reminded of how our biological body will oftentimes follow its own rules as inscribed on its DNA rather than serve our heart’s desire. Is this defeat enough to urge you to accept your body’s rule and birth a child? Do we really have to debate the answer?

Sadly, we are forced to debate indeed. Fighting a battle with one’s mind and body does not suffice; not when the mob out the window wants a part of your body as well. These people screaming at Salazar, burning with desire to save that tiny speck which, to their eyes, was already an infant crying for its mother’s breast, they denied her right to fight any battle. Was it really empathy they felt? Would they protect the life of every crying infant coming to life in any part of this world if it were their choice, would they nurse every hungry baby and lull them to sleep if given the chance? Do people who oppose abortions to this day feel so much for these creatures-to-be that to them that body they will grow their way out of, devouring and bruising and stretching it, has no other option but to oblige? Should the mother live in misery and regret, facing forevermore the manifestation of her own suppressed will, the flower of her unwanted pain, just because her instinct might guide her into becoming a loving and protective parent?

All in all, to be in control of one’s body there are battles to be fought both within and out, there are sacrifices to be made. There is rejection, ridicule, violence, loneliness, guilt. There is a doctor with a blood-red robe leaning over your open legs, ready to scrape your insides out while an enraged crowd blames you for all evil, sadness and pain. There is, quite possibly, the lingering “What if?” that could follow you for many years to come, poisoning your mind through the voices of benevolent church-goers. But there is also this ultimate relief, empowerment and freedom that Salazar felt right after the procedure, bleeding on a hospital chair. That sweet emptiness of the body, the lightness of spirit when you know you made the right choice. The spit on the face of the people who tried to imprison you in your own body and maybe even the middle finger to your own biology. I can imagine Salazar resting victorious on that chair, thinking to herself “You tried to deceive me, my uterus, but I know how to make you bleed for real. I am you, but much more than you, you cannot win this game.”

**Tsompanaki Eftychia (1563201800297)**

Reading Irigaray was like leaving the doctor’s office after a not so comforting/comfortable talk, but it was professional, the place was spic and span, the jargon went over my head though I retain some faint idea about what was talked about – perhaps I will need a second opinion but it’s over now. After leaving that clean-cut industrial-strength “lecture”, you read Salazar and you move down in the world. It’s a clinic, small-scale, even the protests that day are comparatively “undramatic” but boy, do you get your money’s worth there. Because you are there; not holding this woman’s hand or waiting to give her a ride home when it is all over, you are there where someone is finally speaking the truth. There is no embellishment, no high-strung drama, nothing that screams manipulation like at the other doctor’s office – because let’s face it, those who seem to know what they’re talking about are never too willing to let us in on it too easily, no, we have to earn crossing the threshold, we have to use the “little gray cells” if only to prove that we are worthy, that we do deserve the wisdom they are imparting to us. Not Salazar; there is no admission fee, welcome to my life, come sit down –as me– in the waiting room, let a bunch of stupid stuff go through your mind and if you are lucid enough or pay attention or go back over it carefully with a fine-tooth comb, then maybe, just maybe you will realise that you are that woman. That any woman can be that woman, putting herself through this because this is what her mind dictates; she is not sweeping anything under the carpet, yes, you “can get rid of an accidental pregnancy”, no, you “can’t get rid of cancer”. More than that, you can finally have a say in life; sure you are alone, unemployed, dirt poor but this one thing you can do for you. And you don’t need self- righteous people getting in your face; it is my understanding you can be self-righteous only if you are closed- minded and don’t know the meaning of self-doubt, and that won’t fly with me. Not tonight. Not after they closed “down there” in Ensler’s interview with the Jewish lady, not after the memory of my first period came flooding back and I am there, dialing with trembling hands my mother’s office number to tell her, I am not sure why, but I know I need to get it out because what is spilling out of me – it’s not fear; it’s excitement, it’s the female secret, it’s the beauty of not knowing that this means for you, right there and then, what you know it to have meant so many years later. But I lost my train of thought… No, self-righteous won’t fly with me tonight, not after a woman shred to pieces is haphazardly put back together into existence, who knows how, and says “So cold, the steel rod canceling my heart”. What I am reading is cancelling my heart, what she went through is cancelling my heart, the pain and humiliation of a long river of women whose reality this was, has been, is, will be is cancelling my heart; my heart that flatlines before the unfathomable trauma and jerks back to life because another woman witnesses the vagina in all its shit-covered glory – but not its only glory. The things a woman will do for her offspring; the first sacrifice at the altar is her entire body for 9 months and the excruciating pain for however long the labour takes. I am left to wonder. How are there mothers who don’t love their children? How are there children who don’t love their mothers? How do babies grow into sadists who do not see their mothers in the women they defile simply to ejaculate bravado, machismo and foul-smelling relief? And how are there still women who don’t love ourselves? This, also, shouldn’t fly with me. With us. No, too self-righteous. This shouldn’t fly with me. Period.

**Gyftopoulou Vassiliki (1563201700044)**

**“If these walls could talk…”: A narration from the perspective of the clinic as a character in Deborah Salazar’s *My Abortion***

Let me introduce myself: I am the clinic. Well to be exact, the abortion clinic. However, even before my construction was completed and I was brought to this world, my “fellow” citizens had given me and my sisters other names, not so sweet and appropriate. *Slaughterhouse…Temple of sin*. My doctors, who incessantly work and strive to give hope, have been proclaimed murderers, henchmen of the Netherworld. My patients, my sad visitors, have been insulted, cast as worshipers of the evil and society’s black sheep.

I know, by saying all this, I certainly haven’t made a good first impression. Nevertheless, allow me to reveal, through a short narration, that the so-called American Scalpel Massacre that goes on inside me is not at all what it seems…

On the 15th of June, the sun hadn’t fully risen, yet the first arriving doctors and nurses were already sweating as they exited their cars in the parking lot. You could tell it was going to be one scorching day. As always, Dr. Shapiro entered in a rush and performed his morning ritual, before even smiling to the clinic staff or taking a sip from his ice tea. He walked up and down outside, collecting cardboard signs left there by protesters and asked Larry, the newly-employed young man working at the front desk, for a damp cloth. Then, maniacally, he started cleaning the tomato stains from my glass entrance. “Those people…how can they call themselves Christians?” he murmured to himself as he wiped off the dried tomato juice. I don’t blame him. One time, poor Heather, the nurse with the curly ginger hair, got out to get some fresh air during her break and instead of taking a bite from her salmon sandwich, she got a handful of Greek yogurt thrown right in her face. After that, she prefers to lunch in the dining room.

A couple of minutes went by and, as usual, the two Scarecrows came marching down the road, looking intimidating and ready to fight. The woman, who seemed like Death himself, was carrying a cross and the Bible and the man, walking right beside her, had a folded picture of a crying baby on his breast pocket. Dr. Shapiro grunted as he sensed their presence and when they took their usual position on the curb he stared sharply at them and got inside.

It was around that time I noticed a familiar car approaching; however, I didn’t immediately distinguish the face of the driver. “She has been here before, that’s for sure,” I thought. And then it hit me: “Of course! It’s Debbie!” She had been working as a volunteer escort for our patients three years before and when I tell you that there hadn’t been a calmer person than her, I mean it. At that moment I overflowed with happiness, as well as with questions concerning her surprising return. But as she stepped out of her vehicle and I took a closer look, I realized that her visit was not of the positive kind: her belly wasn’t poking out, however the heavy looking paper bag she was carrying and her frown gave her pregnancy away.

Without any hesitation, as expected, the Scarecrows greeted her in the worst way possible. I’m telling you, they never stop harassing women. They call them horrible names and make them feel guilty of their decision. I thought that Christianity was all about love, acceptance and forgiveness. But those people coming here are homophobic, vulgar, and absolutely brutal. Dare to turn your other cheek to them and they’ll beat you to the ground. What they simply cannot comprehend is that these women don’t really want an abortion, it’s their last choice. Yes, mistakes can be made and stopping a human life from evolving and eventually being born is awful. However, raising or abandoning an unwanted child is far worse.

Honestly, the best way to cope with them is by laughing at their faces. Exactly what Deborah did, as she walked right past them. The man got seriously infuriated with her unexpected reaction but Deborah, I believe, definitely won the argument without even speaking once.

Oh how much I wish I could silence them simply by closing all the doors and windows! Unfortunately their shouts and loud protests are a constant reminder to my patients that abortion is neither a simple nor a painless procedure, physically or emotionally. Screams, chants and horrible tapes playing echo everywhere, in all of my rooms. The staff always tries to drown them out by blasting the televisions’ volume to maximum, but that doesn’t make much difference. The only thing making them go quiet, for a while at least, is anesthesia.

Nevertheless, although the situation is pretty much always this gruesome, light can be seen at the end of the tunnel from time to time. Here women unite, they come together, they sympathize with each other and they become supporters of the one whose name is called next. If the atmosphere isn’t too heavy, stories are shared and the experience seems to become lighter. Hands are held together, complete strangers become sisters for a while and sometimes this sisterhood lasts longer when friendships are born.

Just like that, Deborah’s abortion was over and she was now sitting in the dark room, which was suddenly illuminated by the hands of two strangers bonding. Without ever exchanging one word, the two women gave each other hope.

I believe that now, as I slowly end this story, I should reintroduce myself. I am a shelter, but I am also the last resort. I will be here and I will keep on offering my services as long as women need me. Until sex education and protection methods are properly taught in schools, until women start getting paid enough money to support a family and until they stop getting raped, I’m not going anywhere. If these walls could talk, they would narrate the stories of warriors.

**Pissari Zinovia (1563201800290)**

**The Stream-of-Consciousness Vagina**

“Coochie snorcher”. I laughed and laughed. The first time around, and the second, and this one. It gets me … every time. Seriously though … mine is the stream-of-consciousness vagina … (boy … would Freud have a field day with this one!)

The first time I watched *The Vagina Monologues* was way back … a couple of years after my MA I would say, around 2000-2001 on V-day. All pumped up by my work on female subjectivity in Shakespeare and with Greer’s lectures still throbbing in my ears (… horrible experience by the way … very much of a hard core feminist and still very ‘in’ at that time, not much of a teacher though. Thank God the university made sure there was plenty of cheap wine after those functions …. Oh and cheese … lots of cheese, for some reason – still working on the reason for that by the way). Feminist theory is all fine and dandy but unless somehow materialized it is just one more tool for examining, interpreting, claiming and defining my experience for me. Nevertheless, shocked, astonished, liberated, proud is how I felt after that first time: lucky that I had been born at a time when this kind of work was not only possible or permissible but embraced, acknowledged, part of an activist milieu that was set to change mentalities and attitudes, a milieu to which I desperately wanted to belong. Did I appreciate it? Sure… I remember being very “intellectual” about it when discussing it with friends from the Women Studies departments around the U.K. My prudish younger self needed the distance afforded me by the elation I felt in my recently carved out academic self. Detached … that’s it. That is what I was. An outsider looking in; an Other to my own sensations and understanding. I appreciated the immediacy of the language, the bareness of meaning. I suppose … I admired (and still do) the strength of simple words carefully put together. Aestheticized … that is what my experience was … yet the aesthetics of it all had already started to chip my prudishness away, like a peel-off face mask, or an old, worn out wall-paper.

The second time was a few years later. It must have been 2007 I think … in Scotland … live this time, not televised … put on by girls I knew, friends and acquaintances … young women with whom I was sharing yet another stimulating academic year at St. Andrews Uni. I went alone. I chose to go alone. I needed to process it without talking about it this time. I laughed, I cried (secretly) … I was immersed (too much now that I think about it). I rapaciously delved into the minds of women who were my friends and ‘family’ during that year: Elizabeth, who cleaned and “decorated” her coochie snorcher to get the attention her slim body, blond hair and blue eyes yearned for, the attention her sharp intuition and inquisitive mind needed to function. Then there was Shiobhan who was s(h)aving it for after she got married and then there was Charlotte - Shiobhan’s roommate - who loved Cixous, Aphra Behn and …vaginas (already a ‘connoisseur’ of all of the above … if you catch my drift) … women who stood up for their choices and ‘announced’ their physical and mental presence to the world on **their** terms. My context, this time, was real and so were my tears while watching … tears of gratitude for having been privileged… for having been blessed with a vagina (and the ability for multiple orgasms never hurt). No more masks to peel off. Pure, scrubbed down, hard core understanding of … (what else) the vagina!

Third time around this one … somewhat older now … hopefully (but not quite sure) a little wiser now. At another Uni this time. Still studying, still becoming. A lot of bodies have perished and come into being since then. My mum died … she was both a powerful and a troubled coochie snorcher … attached to a mother who nurtured her corpus but undermined her spiritus, haunted by her unfulfilled desire to study, to work, to … be her own vagina (it’s probably good she is not around or she would faint at this). And then … then came my daughter (the new, the still undefined, the future of all vaginas) and with her came a strange ability to truly empathize with all as an organic, active part of a mystical continuum of female bodies, of blood, of flesh, of vaginas. I think I get it now! Maybe I get it differently now … It was only after watching it this time, though, that I honestly ‘felt’ not thought about it. I felt the itchiness of the shaved vagina (God did I feel that one…) ; I experienced the anger of the vagina that, scrubbed clean of any evidence of corporal existence, is forced to the sublimity of either virginal purity or motherhood, disassociated from its life-giving force that comes with blood, tears, pain … transformation. I cried **with** the vaginas who withdrew, to be discarded no more; I cried **with** those that were brutally raped, victimized, Otherized, politicized, plundered and deprived of the soul of their existence: their connection to their nature … ostracized and alienated from their vaginas. I felt the deliverance of the lesbian vagina, of the orgasmic vagina, of the forgotten vagina …

I am not **a** woman, not anymore; **I am Woman** … that is what I felt … I am the underage girl given in marriage when she can barely read; I am the woman who is reclaiming her body through her right to abort a pregnancy; I am the woman whose sexuality and pleasure are curtailed by F.G.M. practiced on her by other women (still trying to get my head around this one); I am the woman whose sexuality and pleasure cannot be contained; I am the woman behind the hijab and the one sitting in the desert under the scorching sun to take the university entrance exams and thrive … against all odds; I am the witches in Salem; the Queens of times long gone and those in drag; I am the prophet, the victim, the woman who was born a woman trapped in a body without a vagina and thus never ‘looked at’ as a woman … ever. I am the one that conquers the world and the one that is buried in its rubbles sheltering her babies with her body, as she did in the womb. I am the spinster thriving in the margins and the wife who is either buried with her husband or squashed under his feast. I am the woman who laughs, cries, falls, rises, fails, tries, changes, bears, forbears, gives up, persists, insists, surrenders, fights, LIVES. I AM the flood pouring out of me … **I AM EVERY WOMAN** (Chaka Khan style). I AM HERE. I HAVE COME. **I AM US …**

**Tsompanaki Eftychia (1563201800297)**

**On Richard Selzer’s “Sarcophagus”**

Music to my ears. This is how I would describe my initial feeling. Perhaps it is because of the way he presents his people, like a conductor introducing the sections of the orchestra or because there is a rhythm to this piece or his surgical methodology, more beat than words; there is a steady or unsteady, I don’t know, rhythm to it. Yes, it could be the sound of the monitors counting the final breaths, but I think not. I think it is this man, this surgeon who took an oath to Hippocrates but resorts to worshiping the Muse (ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, that muse) and chooses the act of writing as his personal “Lord and Saviour”. Somewhere in my mind resides the oxymoron that surgeons are more likely than other professionals to commit suicide while they are also profoundly religious but perhaps I am making it up – this is what sciolism with a generous dose of *House MD, Grey’s Anatomy* and the like will do to you. But still, this man makes music out of surgery, a well-timed and fastidiously rehearsed waltz. “Fat… muscle… fascia…” One, two, three… “Open, evacuate, explore” – “blood slows, press harder, bleeding stops”… One, two, three… I was so ready to read about the man fighting for his life, identify with and root for him that it caught me off guard when I ended up falling and feeling for the surgeon. Like all mortals, I have only been on the other side of the picture, waiting outside operating rooms, patients’ rooms, the doctor’s office, I have been on the operating table, I have had this horrible tongue depressor thingy and the unavoidable gag reflex, but still I feel for this doctor.

Normally, I don’t want to think about doctors as humans; I am in awe of them, humbled by their life-saving abilities though the truth out there says that I should know better, but still, this doctor… He offers such a bare naked glimpse into what it’s like to leave work and take a dead man with you, on your conscience, on your tabula that it is no longer rasa, on that grocer’s tab where you put down, end-to-end, day after day, your mistakes and can hardly wait to assort them with small personal triumphs. This doctor takes himself down from the pedestal (on which I alone had put him) and looks himself in the eye; finally, somebody admits that “to receive a tube in the windpipe while fully awake is a terrifying thing”, no, it’s not not going to hurt, it will hurt like hell and that’s that, deal with it. Finally, somebody tells it like it is; split or not so split-second decisions, “nothing to do”, the frustration after you have come to terms with it but the patient’s body has not – “the man will not die”. One, two, three… “The man is dead”. No, you are not doctor almighty, sometimes you are the Grim Reaper by proxy. It’s not okay, but it is what it is. Yes, “ruthless the eye of the kin” but ruthless your eye as well: the men “are all fat”, “the women, too, are fat” – is it professional perversion seeing the obese as the ones causing damage to themselves and then putting you in the impossible position to save them? Yes, but this is human, and so are you, doc. You who are longing for a reassuring word from your intern, you who shudder when touching the body of the patient you just let die under your knife, you who are showering with the curtain open to dispel the presence of death from the vicinity. I read you, doctor, you are only human. I don’t know what you were doing in the operating room for the third time; repenting, paying your respects, getting your bearings, forgiving yourself, asking for forgiveness? I like your words, doc, they are very poetic and totally incompatible with the cold room where you do your thing; “scythe”, “pediments” and “hieroglyph” – “the breasts of God” I didn’t care too much for – but I think I hear you. You have no idea how to deal with this, have you? That’s why you turned to writing? “A cell lost the rhythm of the body”, yes, but where were you? One, two, three…

P.S. And as for the title… I don’t know who goes in it. One by one those who don’t make it out of the operating table? Or a piece of the conscience you are human enough to be losing as you make the hard decisions that define the lives and deaths of so many all the while suturing and never missing a beat? One, two, three, one, two, three…

**Apostolopoulou Stavroula (1563201700016)**

Reading Richard Selzer’s ‘Sarcophagus’ and William Carlos Williams’s ‘Death (C Version, 1930)’ and ‘The Dead Baby (1925)’ some lines popped up. And I thought that they could be used for the composition of this journal.

The fall seems long,

but it’s a quick

and silent one

I suppose.

Then surgeons,

narrow margins of hope,

us hanging in those crevasses.

Your body

and a loud thud,

your weight multiplied

by several times,

your body

and the velocity,

pressure,

power,

the cemented ground,

the ground,

your body,

an instant pool of blood.

Late in the afternoon

my phone rang.

‘I was asleep, is everything alright?’

‘No, hold on.’

Then a dead line.

My phone again,

and just a headline,

you fell from some height.

My phone leaves my hand,

my teeth hit the floor,

spasms,

your pain,

how painful,

how cruel,

throwing my mind up,

I cannot process it,

you’ve borne enough

of unreasonable commands.

Skull fractured,

cranial damage,

your brain trying to fight back,

your healthy body

rushes to the fight.

Two days of faint hope,

then you’re gone,

clinically dead,

or brain death,

surgeons inform us,

the terms are related I suppose.

‘Then you can take anything you need’,

your mother’s utterance signals

your corporeal extension

through your organs’ transfer.

They’ll find their place

into different bodies.

I am trying to make sense,

of compartments and wholes,

of integrity and partiality.

But the violence of the fall,

your silent body

are my mind’s open wound,

serosanguinous drainage there,

draining memory-fluids

of the sound of the thud,

of the sight of your body

and the blood,

of your mother’s shrieks,

and of sirens and ambulances

arriving 20 minutes late,

20 minutes late,

‘cause there was not one

instantly ready for the service,

so your body could wait and die

a little more.

I am crushing.

And it is incompatible,

your flawless,

fresh as the flowers

appearance

in the coffin.

So serene,

and loving,

and you.

I think you might as well

talk to me.

But no.

Your emptied of life,

emptied of parts.

I don’t wish to write of the last act.

I’ve been reading about

embodied relationality lately.

And it seems we are connected,

dead

and living

bodies

that is,

salvaging something

of what has been.

I wish corporeal lines

could reverse mortal spells,

but I’ve been taught

they can’t.

**Giannopoulou Foteini (1563201700031)**

The imagery in William Carlos Williams’ poetry is quite haunting in its stark-naked realism and expressive precision. Death as an idea is also haunting; ever since we become aware of in some early stage of life, we cannot manage to shake off this fear that it follows as ever so closely, or the realization that embracing it is inescapable. Reading any text that touches upon the topic of death has been a labor for me –and I suspect many others- simply because I would rather ignore it and bury my head in the sand until it knocks on my door. Poetry, however, never fails to speak of the unspeakable. In “Death” and “The Dead Baby”, Williams’ poems in question, death is presented through images, either of a corpse or of a house awaiting one, which give expression to what it feels like to experience it.

In “Death”, the narrator is both magnetized and appalled by a man’s grotesque-looking corpse. Feelings of aversion and hatred are building up inside them and they verbally attack the corpse for lacking any human qualities and for failing anything noble and valuable. While going on attacking a corpse for whatever reason might seem absurd, I somehow find it perfectly understandable. That miserable and hopeless feeling one experiences when wanting to say a proper goodbye to a loved one but having nothing left but an empty shell is a heavy burden. It is so unbearable that it might turn against the dead themselves; for not clinging on life enough, for not fighting hard enough, for giving up on themselves, in any case for not being there anymore. Even if death comes as relief to a pain it is still not satisfactory; a night more would do, or an hour more, just a few words, a last kiss... but what if things could get better and a good treatment was found just next week or what if I were more well prepared myself? Death is rarely ever a perfectly placed full stop but rather a cacophonous interruption, whether abrupt or not. For the poet, death is also the shameful defeat of love. We might be careful enough to vow love “till death do us apart” but actually it is impossible to accept this violent separation with someone we truly love. We might promise to preserve all that is noble to us, our love, the dignity of their character, our memories, but very soon we realize that it is all slipping away quite fast and that it will never be enough. “Death” is an accurate depiction of this bitter realization and its manifestation as disappointment and anger, or, alternatively, a desperately optimistic and unforgiving rejection of death for life and all that it stands for.

We never really encounter a corpse in “The Dead Baby”. What the poet explores is the perspective of the parents of the child. They’re “unconsoled” and “pitiful” and manically sweep the floor as if to banish away the grief. The house in which they await the corpse of their baby to arrive from the hospital is in a way their own grave. How could you comfort these people and give them hope again? I never had a baby and therefore never lost a baby and cannot conceive the pain experienced by people in this position. I know people who did, some who endured with courage, some who lost parts of their minds too big to recover, some who went sick themselves, all of them strong beyond measure. It appears that society marks these people from that point on; every introduction to them is incomplete without the obligatory reference to their dead kid. It is as if their identity is bound to this event forevermore, similarly to people with kids that suffer from chronic illnesses or are disabled. On the other hand, death in infancy and especially loss of an unborn baby is veiled with secrecy and even if revealed is still not openly talked about. There is something shameful about it, as if it is the parents’ personal failure, I suppose, in particular the mother’s. This is also reflected in the poem, when this restless motion of sweeping and the plea to hurry up attempt to keep away the curiosity of people and hide the family’s pain. Having experienced all the intricate traditional rituals of celebrating the dead in a Greek village I acknowledge their value as a distraction and consolation, despite the energy they require which is hard at that point to find. You sweep the floor, alright, you clean every corner of the house, because people will come to pay their respects. You prepare drinks and food for them and brace for the necessary small talk. You will mourn the dead for a night inside the living room as if they are indeed a curiosity and you will not be too dramatic so as to not scare the guests. Then there are all the rituals of a funeral and the many memorials to follow, and somehow the realization that even though you hated every damn second you somehow managed to push yourself through it all. In the end, I suspect, it is all a matter of pushing yourself through, for whatever reason is convincing enough to yourself.

All in all, death is something we are not meant to welcome, but it is something we are meant to accept. At first to dissociate from the decaying body like the narrator in “Death” or to throw ourselves in a task like the one in “The Dead Baby”. To feel all the regret, guilt and despair, to mourn. To slowly get back on our feet and see life for what it is, too short, too precious. One way or another, to keep on living until there is no other option but to put our hands up and surrender.

**Gyftopoulou Vassiliki (1563201700044)**

**The tragedy of premature death in William Carlos Williams’ “The Dead Baby”**

William Carlos Williams’s poem “The Dead Baby” deals with the raw, almost unfiltered reality of death at its worst and the grief which haunts those left behind to reminisce. As his poem “Death” reveals to us, the poet does not seem to be that much concerned with the afterlife or the metaphysical aspect of death. What he finds intriguing is the emptiness which switches positions with a no-longer existent entity, as he contemplates on what life must be like after death for those on earth.

Firstly, we need to answer the following question: What motivated the poet to derive inspiration from a baby’s death?

If we want to understand the significance of the theme for Williams, we surely need to take into consideration his personal involvement in the matter. Apart from being a poet, Williams was a doctor, specifically a paediatrician, who additionally delivered babies. Keeping in mind the chronology of Williams’s vocational journey as a baby-deliverer (beginnings of 20th century) and the limited medical means of the time, we realize that surely Williams must have dealt with a considerable number of unsuccessful deliveries, or many cases of infant or child mortality.

Williams’ decision to discuss the issue goes against the protocol by which many doctors strive to abide in dealing with the emotional burden of losing a patient. In contrast to medical professionals like Selzer, who in his essay *Sarcophagus* seems to desperately try to detach himself from the tragic outcome of a surgery, Williams allows himself to be in close contact with this harsh aspect of his profession and feels the need to discover what happens ‘after’, behind the closed doors of a dramatically affected household.

Furthermore, what makes this poem so powerful and able to shake readers to their cores is the nature of the death that is approached. It is neither the death of an old woman who passed away after years of suffering nor the fatal result of driving under the influence. It is death at its most unnatural, unfair and devastating form. It is a life lost before lived, a story that was left untold before it even started. The death of a baby is the most abrupt and cruellest termination of life’s biggest celebration. And as poets are always interested in the extremities of the human experience, Williams attempts to dive in and sink us too into the abyss.

Perhaps we can be led to the deconstruction of the poem by analysing the very first word of the first stanza, which is “sweep”. The literal and obvious meaning of “sweep” helps us visualize the preparation of the dead baby’s family for a home funeral. The room needs to be clean for those who will attend the funeral and for the welcoming of the dead baby in its tiny coffin. More importantly however, the imperative mode which is adopted here and throughout the poem is an indication for the necessity, the peer pressure on grieving parents to move on, let their pain and troubles behind and focus on what the future holds. As the poem implies, those suffering individuals are usually expected to erase and restart, just like a house is stripped away of its dirt and refreshed. The last, bleakest and more poetic reading of “sweep” is the personification of Death, the Grim Reaper, who uses his scythe to sweep and grab souls in a rapid, arc-like movement.

In the following stanzas, the poet focuses on the parents and the baby’s current state. Again, a comparison to Williams’ poem “Death” can help us realize the significant imagery of “not seeing” and “seeing”:

Dead  
       his eyes  
rolled up out of  
the light—a mockery  
  
                                   which  
love cannot touch—

The dead man’s eyes rolling up until only white is left and the baby “blindly” leaving and going up to heaven are both representations of “not seeing”, which means death for William Carlos Williams. On the other hand, the mother’s eyes, as “the windows of the soul”, appear tired, gloomy and stained only with the color of death, yet “seeing” makes her alive. The mother is doomed to keep on living, keep on seeing a world without her baby in it, while everything seems to be a reminder of her tragic loss. Her love is defeated, beaten and cannot reach out to touch her child anymore.

Lastly, I want to focus on the three last lines which mark the ending of the poem and strike me the most:

a white model of our lives   
a curiosity   
surrounded by fresh flowers

The baby is white, lifeless and pale by Death, but also pure in the soul, as it has lost its life at this early stage of absolute innocence. The baby, moreover, is the parents’ model, their creation, the outcome of the unity of two split paths into a single one. The death of the baby is surrounded by curiosity: *What went wrong? Why did this have to happen? Why is life punishing us?* Perhaps however, the poet does not refer to the baby, but to the coffin: painted white to signify the purity of the soul inside it, the model which ends up shaping and foreshadowing the parents’ sad life and a curiosity, a box full of mystery, to be looked at by “the curious holiday seekers”. In both cases, the baby and the coffin are surrounded by fresh flowers: beautiful creations of nature, freshly ripped from the ground (reaped) and destined to quick decay and ultimately, Death.

**Karaiskakis Emmanouil Leandros (1563201700071)**

**The Raw Objectification of the Dead Body**

Death is a part of life we cannot choose to avoid. When one is born, their path and ultimate destination is death. We cannot be born into immortality –that is a concept imagined by almost all of us at some point in our lives; but we are forced to adapt to the idea of a life that is bound to its death, a game that at some point will be over. The first time we realize that our parents or our friends will someday die is when we are kids and we understand that life is not eternal. The thought is painful; I remember I was 8 years old when I was sitting alone in my room in the middle of the night and I was crying out of fear that my parents wouldn’t be alive forever. It’s at this age that we realize that and it’s the next years of our life that we have to accept it, either by our mature stance towards life, or by experience; it can either be our experience or other people’s experience but both contribute to the awakening of our consciousness and the inevitable journey to maturity and growing up.

The concept of death is almost ironic. When we are born we are expected to grow, survive in a world full of dangers, learn, evolve, mature, be educated, find work, strive for a life whose concepts we have built in our minds, and then work for it to happen, reproduce or not reproduce, be present or “absent”, live or “not live”, namely, exercise our choice to find the courage to strive for happiness and psychological betterment, and finally get as much as we can get until the day we actually die. Isn’t it a paradox? All that work and all that passion, all this energy we send out and attract turns into something that’s deprived of energy or substance; enters the portals of nothingness and becomes nothing.

Death has always been part of the arts and of literature especially. Since the ancient times and Antigone to the present, we have seen multiple attempts by writers, play-writers, poets and songwriters to illustrate death and turn experience into art, the real into the surreal, the ephemeral into the eternal, the life into a project. From the death of Ophelia in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet,* which is interwoven with the concept of madness and psychological instability, to the death of the Lady of Shalott by Alfred Tennyson’s poem with the same name, where we see death as a result of an artist’s contact with the real world that has emerged from the interruption of societal exile and the effect of love upon the artist. In almost every dramatic text or at least literary work that talks about real life and its numerous concepts and stages, death is present and it cannot be overlooked.

We see death as the ending of life and that contributes to the tendency to deprive language of all life when we talk about it. We have been living in a world where we learn how to use language in order to talk about animate things and find their beauty, the details of their character and multiple facets of their existence but when these things become, just as we proclaimed them, things, we become raw too. Language comes off raw and unwilling to romanticize. There are examples of literature that romanticize death but it takes an author with philosophical tendencies and a poetic mind to go towards that direction. It usually has to do with the opposite of poetic expression when we are faced with the concept of death in real life and especially when we write about it, in order for it exist in the dimension of fictional life, that kind of transcends it into an afterlife that’s forever and eternal.

This rawness of language and literary depiction of death may be a realization of the rawness of life itself after all. When someone dies, we realize that all our work, everything we’ve built, everything we’ve become has died too. It’s as if we never existed. And if there is no one to remember us or if there isn’t anything that we’ve left behind, we are more likely to be lost in oblivion and actually have our fingerprints erased from what has been a daily struggle for survival as long as we lived.

William Carlos Williams in his poem “Death” states explicitly what we just mentioned: “there’s nothing legitimate in him anymore, he’s nothing at all”. When we die we lose our legitimateness, we become fake, inanimate. Our bodies lose their essence and they become just bodies. In the poem that was mentioned above the nothingness and uselessness of the body is emphasized: “put his head on one chair and his feet on another and he’ll lie there like an acrobat”. The body feels useless and vulnerable. It is being treated as an object, as a soulless puppet that can be put in any position we feel like putting it. Hanging in between two chairs, laying in a wooden casket, rolling in a machine that is going to cremate it and turn it into dust. The body can be put in a machine, just like plastic and glass and aluminum can be put in a machine and be recycled. The body without the soul becomes waste and the rest of us that live have to do something with it.

Language becomes raw and ironical, just like the body without the soul --how ironic it is that once a human being loses their consciousness and life, they are treated or talked about with different respect or morality--language becomes as ironic as death itself. When someone is alive we use a specific language to talk about them. As Antonio Damasio states in his book *Self comes to mind: Constructing the conscious brain*, “our bodies are the nerve centers through which we are consciously oriented to the physical world”. But when someone moves out of the physical world, we are supposed to use language in a way that honors a non-physical entity that once was physical and existed, but also in a way that connotes how dead, and missed or not missed, gone to the afterlife or died forever, depending on an individual’s religious or non-religious perspective, the spiritual or the entity-body that soon is going to rot into an un-entity of a million little bodies of worms and bacteria, is.

The objectification of the dead body is unavoidable. Our psychological state when someone dies is as it is in order for us to cope with the death of the person or animal that used to live. It is as if we avoid romanticizing the psyche or adding emotion to the emotionless and motionless, in order to avoid being emotional ourselves. Grief is inevitable and has many stages where we put the psyche to its spiritual place or we try to hold onto it as we cannot accept our person’s passing, but when it comes to doctors or people who are up against the concept of death every day and has become part of their job, they have to be practical. The practical is more powerful than the emotional when it comes to death since the practical is raw and simply stated whereas the emotional is endless. The practical is the here and now whereas the emotional is the ongoing process of the then, the now, and the forever. Richard Selzer in *Sarcophagus* had to be practical; he had to perform a surgery, be face to face with the fact that he couldn’t rescue the man under operation, inform the family with calmness and keep the seriousness of the situation and at the end, as it is stated in the very ending paragraph of the text, refer to the man that he operated as a “pale white body”. He couldn’t resist the outcome of a raw procedure that led to the raw use of language.

Language takes many forms when it comes to talking about life and death. An individual’s subjectivity becomes an objective truth once they have died. What accounted to be their truth when they were alive is now their death. That is the dead body’s truth. Its raw objectification is sometimes needed in order for the ones that are left behind to cope with the ironic, the sudden, the sad aspect of life; death. And literature plays an important role in the imagining of life and death, and the way humans tend to want to turn the mortal into immortal, as a sense of survival, as a reason to keep on dreaming, and keep on wishing that all this life we live and fight for is not wasted.

**Koumarianou Elena (1563201700091)**

**On Richard Selzer's “Sarcophagus" and *Grey’s Anatomy***

Oh, the self-contained world of hospitals. My mother worked in hospitals for most of her life, so I can say I've seen some inside out, from random storage closets, to where infamous hospital food is prepared, I've seen the best of them (or worst, depends on how you see it). But if there is one thing I've never seen, that's an operation room. And considering I'll probably never have access to one as surgeon or staff, I'm content with never having to see one up close. So, if my only views and memories of hospitals have (fortunately) been those of take your kid to work days and of playing with 3D heart models in my mother's boss's office (not as fun as Legos, I'll admit, especially not with the added bonus of a surgeon with a God complex trying to teach 6-year-old me what each valve does), then naturally I had to leave the representations of hospitals' actual function to the big, or small, screen. And by that I mean *Grey's Anatomy*. My mother, a workaholic in the truest sense, clearly needed to spend her very limited downtime watching an oversensationalized TV adaptation of her workspace, and of course I joined her in what would become a nightly ritual for (way more than one too many) seasons of the show spanning my childhood through to adolescence. Now, Richard Selzer's text felt just like a *Grey's Anatomy* OR scene. Only the classical music was missing. Of course, the inaccuracies and overly dramatic moments were also missing but that's what you get when a plain old surgeon with no Hollywood aspirations does the talking. The dramatic narration, the religious mysticism with which the surgery is invested, the genius surgeons hard at work to combat everything that could possibly go wrong, it was all there. And of course, the ethical dilemma negotiated by the surgeon and other doctors. In fact, it is this part that reminded me of a particular *Grey's Anatomy* moment. In one episode of the series, there is a kid who needs a liver transplant and will soon die for waiting so long in the list, and a convicted murderer who has severe brain haemorrhage and who has a) expressed his wish to die and b) volunteered to donate his organs to the kid. The crucial piece of information here is that this is an inmate on death row, whose penalty will be delivered in 5 days’ time. When this patient causes enough deliberate harm to his own brain so as to require immediate emergency operation, Dr Meredith Grey (whom I never liked anyway) refuses to page the attending neurosurgeon, wanting to let this man die, despite the fact that this breaches all medical ethics codes, by invoking some universal notion of justice. And when it's serial killer vs innocent child, most if not all would be compelled by her noble sentiment. In this attempt she finds opposition by Dr Christina Yang (who I wish had been the God-complex heart surgeon of my youth) who, when the man cries out for help as he is dying and professes that he does want to live, pages the attending and books an O.R. The surgery of course goes on to be interrupted this time by a senior and very well respected doctor, who has a full-blown emotional breakdown and ponders whether the Hippocratic oath makes any sense in such cases, begging the neurosurgeon to put his scalpel down mid-surgery, effecting this man's death. Long story short, after a battle of wills, the surgery goes on and saves the man, who indeed receives the death penalty 5 days later and whose organs, in a sense, end up being ‘wasted'.

Now, with Selzer and the man with stomach cancer, we have quite a different situation. It is not so much an ethical dilemma between two courses of action that will bring either life or death based on abstract notions of justice, but more so a dead-end, or at least Selzer is really convincing in describing it as such. Provided that this was a consensual operation, and that protocol procedures have been followed, there really seems to be no way to save this man's life, given the extent and irreversibility of the damage. Despite the other doctors being hesitant to be the ones pulling the plug on this surgery, we are made to understand that everything really was done to try and save the patient, but it sadly wasn't enough. Now that we have established the drastically different approaches by Selzer and the *Grey's Anatomy* doctors, there is one point of slight convergence that I think is interesting. When announcing the man's death to his family, Selzer describes them as obese, just like the man was, in the last paragraph likened to a “bullock bled". While Selzer never says such a thing explicitly, I believe these references that come at the moment when a doctor describes the scene of relaying the bad news through ‘pitying eyes’ create a tacit connection between the man's death by cancer and his lifestyle choice. Here I am not taking obesity slightly, and I'll assume that it's probably associated with higher cancer risk, and it goes without saying that obese people should be supported in pursuing a healthy life. What I'd like to say, and I'm not accusing Selzer of it either but rather taking him as a starting point, is that we should really rethink any notions of divine (or secular, for that matter) justice we might have to rationalize and justify human suffering in almost a misanthropic manner, or, even worse, to have a say in who does or does not deserve medical care. I think smoking is the let's get cancer activity par excellence; but I wouldn't want my aunt who recently got lung cancer to not have got treatment so that she could learn a lesson. Of course, there are varying degrees, and compassion is not always on tap for us. I can see why Meredith Grey did what she did. And if I were younger, I'd for sure eagerly agree. Today, I'm much more reserved, and I recognize that this is not an issue my journal can resolve. Enraged as I am by Covid deniers, by archbishops getting expensive experimental treatment in public hospitals that is not made available to anyone else precisely in a public healthcare system where all patients are supposedly equal (why not Κυρ Μπάμπης too, then?), I try to at least think, if rarely provide any productive resolution, how precious life is and with how much more difficulty we ‘should’ be quick to deny anyone that right.

I still find it hard myself, but it's a process, alright.

**Mavroulias Haris (1563201700011)**

This is a poem is about misgendering and deadnaming and general mistreatment by the system of health care. I wrote it while waiting for my referral for hormones, outside a doctor’s office, in a waiting room full of all kinds of patients, since we do not have gender clinics in Greece. And now, having read “Sarcophagus” and the film *Wit*, having had this experience for such a long period of time, and having discussed with other people, how they gave up on their “gender journey” because the system keeps throwing all these irrational obstacles on us, I come think that whether it’s a matter of physical (like cancer) or psychological (like gender dysphoria) support, the approach is the same: “What doesn’t kill you, might be able to help you, make you stronger. But if they cannot help you or you are not strong enough, -well then- too bad, you die!”. Either metaphorically, or literally, as they turn off the oxygen, and they go on to shower off their guilt. You are one less person they have to pretend they care for.

**Fish soup**

I’ve always been afraid of doctors

And who hasn’t, sore throats, aching teeth, breaking arms or legs?

But what do you know

of pain.

Young and hungry for fish soup

the small bone spiky

choked, as I swallowed

the pediatrician’s hand

too big for my thin throat,

I swore

I’d never eat fish soup -unstrained.

Years gone by and what has changed?

Oblivion, ignorance adulthood.

Made me trust you

not forget to strain the soup.

But now what hurts me has no bones

and yet can kill me, inch by inch.

ouch!

Cold tomatoes hurt my teeth

with every bite the dentist’s words.

UTIs burn me not more

than your harassment, you micro biologist

Send me back to the gynecologist

But how can a doctor of women

cure a man,

Needy of hormones, too long and hard

To find, if I’m trans and sane enough,

To answer your pervasive questions;

Did I like playing with dolls, hide and seek?

Want to be a librarian?

Chase wild lions in Africa?

Have I not convinced you

Put cables on my head, destroy my curls

to see the lines not straight, You told me

This place is not for me

in the first place, Are you helping me

find my healthy spirit

or kill it day by day, like my coloured brothers

in the Empire States?

Oh sweet Hippocrates, Nicomachus, Aristoteles, is that what you had

in mind? And if that’s the truth

I speak

I dare you

to look at your Vows and shame;

How you break them every day

Now...

Hide behind your privilege

And watch me fear

Not to

get

sick

again.

**Papageorgiou Christina (1563201700140)**

The first text I read was Selzer’s piece. To be honest, I didn’t know how to feel while reading it because the narration was so distanced that sometimes I felt like I was reading an encyclopedia. But I suppose that death is not something uncommon in this life, let alone in this profession. I certainly did not feel sad or disturbed by the concept of death. I think most people in my generation are unmoved by the image or the thought of a corpse\* (thanks to Hollywood), and I think that's totally okay! In fact, I think that we are extremely lucky (those of us who think like this) to be able to process and accept such a grim concept as something natural and beautiful in so many aspects. I think that there is poetry in dying and that the soul deserves to be finally liberated from its mundane, bodily prison. And even if the soul ceases to exist after the body surrenders, it still is fine because it can finally feel no pain. I think that there is too much injustice and wrong doing in this world to grieve about the dead. Instead I pity the living (in the wise words of Albus Percival Wolfric Brian Dumbledore) who have to keep on enduring the physical and emotional pain that this life presupposes.

I think it is interesting to take a look at how ancient cultures portrayed or treated death. Ancient Egyptians thoroughly prepared their dead for their afterlife with food and possessions. Ancient Greeks believed that death was a passage, hence their placing coins on the dead’s mouth to pay the boatman. Romans shared similar views with Greeks, again placing coins on the eyes of the deceased to securely cross the River Styx. We see a pattern here, that life does not end once the body is dead. Why should we then believe that death is the worst thing that can happen to a person? In reality, it’s the things that happen to us while we are alive that hurt and cause us these unpleasant feelings. According to Zhuang Zhou, death is an extension of existence, something to be celebrated, as the body transforms into another form of life: something like a rock, a tree, a fish or any other kind of being. I’m not saying that, because x number of people say so, that is how it is. But isn’t it interesting how some people choose to react to an occurrence that we don’t actually know whether it is good or bad? Why be upset about something that may actually be good or at least not unpleasant? Instead of being sad we could actually turn the current situation around and honour the deceased by celebrating a circle that is finally closed. Besides that is how life works, just like math!

\*By no means do I refer to the image of a butchered or mutilated body. That would disturb every sane person.

**Patras Athanasios (1563201700150)**

I’ve always known what a sarcophagus is from my history classes and my fascination with all things Egypt, movies about mummies and so on. But I never really thought about the meaning of the word itself, and why it was called that. It’s quite evident when you look at it, at the Greek words that make up this compound, but I guess I never wanted to dig into it much.

Whether in a sarcophagus or a less elaborate casket, the body will decompose eventually. Unless it’s been embalmed the flesh will be eaten and broken down by other living things. In a way, the whole world is a sarcophagus. Like that witticism goes, we’re all infected with a sexually-transmitted terminal disease that’s called life. Would it be the same if there was no death to accompany it?

Selzer’s piece of writing has made me go back and relive moments long gone. He gave me an idea of how doctors might have experienced those moments though: more coldly and in a calculated manner, it’s what they do. Doctors, and surgeons in particular, have to be more detached, I’ve been told, or they could never do what they need to do. And I understand that very well, after all that was my coping mechanism too, for many years.

There is a big part of that day that I do not remember. I recall waking up in the morning and getting ready, I remember getting into the car with my dad and the next moment I recall it’s already dark outside and I’m in a hospital having my wounds treated. A few broken bones and some scrapes and bruises. Does it hurt? Not yet.

The operation takes place the next day. I go to sleep and when I wake up from the anaesthesia I have a foreign object in my arm. Well, not foreign any more, it’s part of me. But as soon as this is over, and with the painkillers dulling my senses I have to ask. What about my father? Where is he?

He’s elsewhere. In a different hospital, in a much worse condition. He’s unconscious and will stay in that ICU for two weeks without ever waking up again. My mother will keep going back and forth, from one hospital to the other, switching faces and attitude when she would walk through the door of my hospital room. After those two weeks her face breaks a little when she has to tell me he has passed away. I have to stay back, with my aunt keeping me company, while the rest of the family go to his funeral. “I want to come too!”, I protest. But the doctors won’t allow me to leave the hospital yet. After all, a funeral isn’t a place for a child

I never saw him again. I guess no one did see *him*, but they did see his body. His dead body. I didn’t, and for years I would be convinced that it was all a conspiracy behind my back. He didn’t die, he just had to go away somewhere. He will come back someday. That tomb I visit and bring flowers to in the graveyard is empty. He’s not there. I guess that part is true, at least. Are the dead people really in their graves? Their decaying bodies are there for a while, sure, but sooner or later only their bones will remain.

I don’t remember crying back then. Some kind of logic took hold of me. If he’s dead, he’s dead. Crying won’t bring him back. But still, for a long time I felt guilty. Was I heartless? Did I feel nothing? It took years of self-reflection to realise that I did the best I could with the cards I was dealt. I had to keep on because he was dead but life was still going on. I couldn’t afford breaking down. So I didn’t. Until I did.

I remember fighting with my mother once, those typical growing-up fights with one’s parents, and telling her “I guess it’d be better if I had died instead of him in that car accident”. As soon as the words left my lips I knew I had stepped over a line. I hurt her that day, but at least we talked about it honestly after that, maybe for the first time. “If I was hurt this much because I lost my husband, I can’t imagine how it’d feel to lose my own son”. Lots of things clicked into my mind after that. All that detachment I had been exhibiting was a facade, a brave face I was putting on, in order not to grieve. Because I was still a kid and I was still alive. I didn’t know for what reason, but I was. And I had to live.

…

So much goes on between a grieving family, not only when they are informed of the death of their loved one but for a long time after that. They are forever changed because of the fact of that death. TRUE. Meanwhile, the doctors who did what they had to do, will have a similar conversation to Selzer’s:

“How did the family take it?”

“They were good, good.”

**Pissari Zinovia (1563201800290)**

**Reversed *Sarcophagus***

I am sorry, but No… No … I can’t.

I can’t feel sorry for you Doc … I know I’ll burn in Hell for this but … I can’t.

I know it’s not your fault … not really … I know you tried … still. I need someone to blame. I feel exhausted blaming myself … drained … empty … a sarcophagus devoid of a body; a body devoid of the capacity to comprehend … still … I blame myself for not knowing enough, not doing enough, not pushing you enough, not listening enough … not hugging enough, not kissing enough, not telling her “I LOVE YOU” enough …

And you … you were just doing your “job” … tired, smelly, sleepless, hungry, overworked, underpaid, treated like an underdog, buried under a pile of paperwork … human … ultimately. I know … but I can’t feel sorry for you … I CANNOT forget nor … forgive. It has to be you … it has to be someone … someone real, tangible, a physical presence, a body of science … someone who knew … knew more than I did … someone who could have taught me, who could have prepared me … who could have … should have saved her … kept her from leaving me …alone, empty …

The other one, the Real One I will only meet once and it will already be too late. He’ll be too busy “taking care” of me then … no time for chit chat then … Besides … the other one, the Real One is untouchable, inaccessible (except for that ONE time), a shadow of all the bodies past, present and future … a ghost. He is the sound of a violin cord that snaps …. He is the light in the eyes that dimmed before she even felt his cool, lulling breath down her neck, drawing life from her last, agonizing one … up and down, up and down … ever so slightly … ever more slowly.

How was it that *The Doors* sang it? Let me see … ah … yes …

This is the end, beautiful friend,

The end of our elaborate plans

The end of everything that stands

The end.

No safety or surprise

The end.

No Doc … that day may have been a bad day at work for you … and she … no more than a negative statistic you would have to doggedly document and live with … but THAT day … that day was the day that time stood still and I was stuck in it …numb in the middle of its vortex while everything, everyone around me was in perpetual motion. No amount of pills you could have given or prescribed could have sedated me more, or reverse that day … and that night. It was long … it was violent … it was … dark

You Doc were there with her during the “necessary” dialysis, there when her heart … stopped, and there when she re-entered her body … under your command, your iron will. You … you did not tell me anything but I … I WAS THERE TOO … right outside that door.

I heard the cord snap … I was there … I KNEW.

I held her hand… all the time … after you left … you left me there Doc to watch as the light in her eyes dimmed … and still, still you said NOTHING … just that you might have to intubate … and me? …The cord broken, the light dimming … I could only hold her hand and listen for her breath … up and down, in and out … slowly, with difficulty … YOU knew … you KNEW she was septicaemic … you KNEW there was no way back and yet … yet you intubated … YOU took her hand away from me, YOU took her breath away from me … Distance … Silence … a hopeless hope … She was waiting for him …. dad … she was waiting for both of them …

06/03/2016, 4:45 am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ She was pronounced.

“The killer awoke before the dawn

He put his boots on

He took a face from the ancient gallery

And he walked on down the hall

…………………………………………………………………

This is the end, beautiful friend

This is the end, my only friend

the end.

The rest has been silence ever since …

You see … Doc … it hurts to set her free.

**Sfakianakis Grigorios (1563201300212)**

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While reading the short story *Sarcophagus* by Richard Selzer, I can’t lie, I found myself feeling very uncomfortable. I’ve had my fair share of cancer running in my family, from my father to his brother and other relatives. All heavy meat eaters, all hard-working people with a will to live, similar to the patient who’s being operated on in the story. I would like to call him the diminished seventh, both for the fact that, like the diminished seventh triad in music, the man requires a resolution in his problem with cancer, and because his humanity undergoes a process of diminishment. That is precisely what caught my eye when I look back at the story, the various escapes the narrator attempts in order to establish, what I imagine to be, the necessary distance between his own living (and healthy) humanity and that of the person being operated on. A distance that by the end of the story becomes the porous border between life and death.

To begin with, the diminished seventh is initially neglected when counting the people who are working on the body of the patient, connoting, thus, a sort of passivity that is incompatible with life. A little slip that shows that the patient’s will should not be taken into account when operating on them. The will of the body of the patient comes as a pleasant surprise, when he gags on the catheter but it needs to be stopped for the operation to continue. This is further solidified in my opinion in the paragraph where we have a list of ingredients that are “compatible with life”. A sort of mechanical understanding of the body of the ill, that is seen as pure chemistry, purposefully ignoring anything that lies outside of the specific material purposes of the operation: seeing a shot of life, a shot of a body whose purpose is to function well, and needs to be repaired. In that moment, the body of the man is not recognised as that of a complete human being that could leave the room if it wanted to. It’s not a body that one would meet down the street. In that moment, the body is a puzzle, a series of challenges that the doctors need to pass in order to get to the final riddle, how to repair it.

As the operation progresses and the body has been dissected so has the language that refers to it. The words used become semantically narrower. We move from “fat” to “muscle” to “fascia”. The essence of the diminished seventh becomes ever more so and is ultimately identified with his stomach. In that moment in the story, that’s all of him. I don’t think it’s an accident after all that when operating on someone doctors cover the rest of the body of the patient. Definitely, to protect it from blood and other fluids, but also for their own vision and concentration to not be obstructed by the humanity of the body being operated on.

And then the language used to refer to the body of the patient changes dramatically with the incision of a very crucial metaphor. The guidelines on the body become “pitons of a mountaineer”, the doctors then become mountaineers and the body of the diminished seventh becomes a mountain. And a little later when the body starts to bleed it does so “all over North America”. This identification is the pinnacle of the narrator’s attempt to escape from the humanity of the body being operated on. By metaphorically associating it with a mountain, he forces the body out of the realm of society. The body becomes a thing to be conquered, to be discovered and to be used, to fit the mould of human sensibility--in this case, the mould of what physical health is. Similar to drilling a mountain to find oil or other precious fluids and minerals, the doctor can now cut and chop and drill into the body of the patient, to find what he’s after. This geological metaphor is used even to describe the cancer he discovers, when he finds a “craterous plain” that has spread and taken over the entire stomach. To remove the cancer then would make the mountain collapse.

By the end of the story, though, despite the narrator’s various attempts to avoid the body of the patient linguistically, before death, and physically, after death, it’s still there. We see the narrator being haunted by it, still trying to figure out its deeper meaning and to make amends with it. He goes back into the operating room, as if having some unfinished business with the body of the dead. But it’s not there, only the memory. That to me is a moment of personal identification with the body of the diminished seventh, a recognition of his humanity. A disregard for the protocols of medicine, and for things that were performed on the body. In that final moment, what I see, is the diminished becoming whole after death, in the memory of the doctor that recognised his body as that of man. No longer simply a stomach or a mountain but a man who’s finally home.

**Papastamos Spyridon (1563201700149)**

Reading through Theroux's "Being a Man" was a reminder of all those prerequisites of masculinity that were imposed upon many male individuals as we grew up. I believe that, those moments of awkwardness and uncertainty were more prevalent during the early school years. At this age, kids can be quite harsh to one another. Boys, in particular, can be really harsh if they take up comments they were exposed to either on TV, on Instagram, Facebook etc., or even from their own parents. Spending my school years in groups of friends who involved both girls and boys, I clearly remember how I felt when I faced some questions/statements:

**Question #1: Did you lose to a girl?**

All kinds of sports (including football, basketball but also being able to think, read and write properly in our Γλώσσα and Μαθηματικά hours) involved a hidden shame boys felt when they "lost" to girls. "How can she be better at basketball? She's a girl!", "She can't be that clever, she's a girl!", "How can she run faster than me, she's a girl!" were all things said by boys during my school years. Some of us could not really tell whether this was a proper and fair statement to make, so we did not discuss that with our friends. However, I couldn't help but feel awkward when something like that happened and I definitely was going through it over and over again. In silence. I questioned myself. In silence. As if girls' victory would decrease my trust among peers and render me a worse version of myself.

**Statement #2: Boys don't cry.**

Sure, a bit of cliché. But it is true! During my school years, I really felt a cloud over me when I was really sad about something. "Don't cry, don't cry", learn to suppress your feelings because when you grow up this is what you have to do. Among all the things we are required to do in our adult life, letting ourselves express our feelings might be the only way out. But, no, men shouldn’t cry. How can we have individuals with real and authentic personalities when we deprive them of the right to feel, to cry, to express themselves? Luckily, one of my primary school teachers really tried her best to take that off of our heads. And she almost made it, to be honest. Also, even as a little child, I instinctively chose to stay with the Cure's version of "Boys Don't Cry" and pay attention to the sweet melody of the song so I somehow demystified that feeling. Or avoided thinking about it, I am not sure.

**Statement #3 Why are you acting like a girl? Man up!**

I mean, really? We raise boys and make them believe that being a girl is what? A deficit? And then we expect them all of a sudden to respect both themselves, women and everyone in our society? In my junior high school years, I was a part of a group of friends where such statements were part of everyday conversations. Of course, everyone would say that they didn't mean it and that they were just fooling around. And that might be true. Still, when we saw boys not wearing ordinary clothes, having a tongue or nose piercing, or not behaving the same way other boys did, they would be called two things. Women or homosexuals. As if those are deficits! And, once again, we expect them all of a sudden to finish school and make a homophobia-free, friendly to everyone and so on society. How?

This veneer of masculinity which many boys seek by following rules and "statements" dictated by a patriarchal society is the best way to promote manliness as the only viable solution. As if it was that straightforward. Being a man, being a woman, a girl, a boy. We are very good at labelling ourselves and those around us but really forget how to be free. How to raise children free of stereotypes. How to be free of that toxic masculinity that all it does is taking away the unique characteristics of our personality. How to be ourselves. So, yes, I am also sick of that masculinity.

**Apostolopoulou Stavroula (1563201700016)**

manhood: the state or period of being a man rather than a child

manliness: (a) the traditional male quality of being brave and strong, (b) the fact of being typically male; masculinity

masculinity: qualities or attributes regarded as characteristic of men

(Definitions by Oxford Languages via Google Search)

Around 1985, Paul Theroux writes ‘Being a Man’, a personal essay in which he expresses his frustration with and aversion towards the social precepts of manliness in America during that time. More specifically, he believes that there is something wrong with manhood (‘I have something of an objection to the way we turn boys to men’), that ‘being ‘manly’ is appalling’ and that manliness, as an indispensable attribute and definitive characteristic of being a man is, in Theroux’s words, a ‘terrible ambition’. While I agree that it is an ambition that ‘insists on difference’, ‘connives at superiority’, ‘is socially harmful’, I cannot really see how being a man is not a ‘privilege’, but rather ‘an unmerciful and punishing burden’.

To begin with, reading that it is ‘generally accepted that to be a man is somehow -even now in feminist-influenced America- a privilege’ I cannot fail but notice an admission that, despite the ‘burden’ manliness comes with, it has indeed been an privilege. Moreover, in my opinion there is an ill suggestion behind this utterance that, even though this privilege has brought about oppression, unfairness, violence towards its inferiors, it would be better off not to receive its rightful indictments, simply because living up to its standards is already hard enough, it needn’t be ‘targeted’ too. It feels as though the implied meaning is that feminism has made it worse for the ‘pitiful (what a lexical choice!) idea of manhood’, simply because it has revealed all the systematic ways of its dominance over and oppression of everyone and everything which is other to it. From my standpoint, I cannot see how men are ‘forced’ into this position of power, which they simultaneously detest, while meanwhile accepting it, and using it. I am really trying to step into the writer’s shoes here (although affirming that one understands another human being is at times a mere pretence and nothing more than a simple sense of contiguity one might feel to another) but the writer here does not render my attempt an easy one.

My initial guess about the content of the essay and stance of the writer on being a man was the following: I will be reading about how the dictates of masculinity affect the primary individual for which they have been socially constructed, that is the cis-male individual. I will be reading about all the problematic aspects of the notion of masculinity, about how the stereotypes of being active, tough, brave, dominant, self-controlled when it comes to feelings, successful, the bread-winner, and all together not effeminate in any way have affected the writer on a personal level; and what impact such a reality has on a macro-level (society). The essay suggests that the failure at a man’s part to perfectly perform masculinity is one that afflicts men in America. In the light of such claims I always try to shift my perspective and assume a different position, in order to understand how difficult it must be -in a society that expects from a man to ‘immaculately’ embody, carry out and after all become a role that has been predetermined for him. Such a reality and inner struggle can turn into an inner crisis. But how am I able to understand all the above, I am not a man after all? I might not be a man, but I am a woman. And the pressures that stem from the expectations about my gender are unequally (meaning more) upsetting. And, to make things worse, I am not the ‘dominant’ part of the ‘male-female’ binary, but the ‘submissive’ one, which means that my ‘struggle’ is also embedded in a context of powerlessness. I tend to believe that it is easier struggling internally to perform manliness successfully, while knowing that all possibilities in the world are open for you; when one can access all spaces and domains of our world an does not grow up with the fear of unjustifiable exclusion, or of violation, when one does not need to fight to be visible and claim basic human rights, then I cannot see how they have it ‘just as bad’ as women, simply because they have to ‘restrict’ themselves in order to fit into some gendered standards. I cannot see how -in the expansion of power- the restrictions of being a man are comparable to those of being a woman. So, while I see the impact gender expectations have on a personal level -since I am a woman and there are expectations for my gender too- I cannot, however, see how our positions are alike.

At this point I cannot avoid questioning whether the notion of manliness as presented by the writer is an accurate one. Was it really necessary for American men in the 1980s to be so absolutely ‘mannish’ as the writer implies they were? What would the repercussions for a boy that did not take up a sport or was not sent to the scouts be? Are the expectations he is presenting for his gender true? I am not sure about the 1980s, but in our days, a white, cis, straight man who ‘denounces’ some aspects of his masculinity and assumes some aspects traditionally thought of as ‘feminine’ is not a male subject that is being mocked at or being viewed as lesser. Amongst the several manifestations of masculinity, there seems to be one that is more accepted and desirable today, the one of a man that is tough but also has feelings for his family and is caring, a man that is both success- and family-driven, a man that is both active but at the same time possesses some sense of cultural finesse, a man that is not oppressive to women, but understands them and provides space, opportunities to them, a ‘respectful’ man… I am not sure about the 1985 reality in America, but it seems to me that in our societies and times such a manifestation of masculinity is an acceptable one, perhaps even the goal. As a result, it is not condemned or excluded, but rather desirable and assuming a privileged position. If the writer is talking about the social impossibility to perform a masculinity that is infiltrated by feminine aspects, then my reply would be that in our days it seems rather rational that this is accepted, and this could have also been the case back in the 1985 America, in ‘the feminist-influenced’ one in his own words.

But let’s consider other types of masculinities too. Manliness comes with its own set of difficulties for cis-men. Agreed. But do cis-men have it worse than other masculinities? My reply to that is no. Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* analyses how invisible, invalid, ignored and marginalised female masculinities have been and still are. Trans men are definitely another example: the strive to live up to the standards of a manliness that systematically opts to protect its own status, disregard other forms of masculinity and attach manliness to biological maleness is not a position I would envy if I were Theroux. And even the privilege of passing is a negotiable one, as it does not always come without internal trouble: when you have been exiled from a world of manliness for years, when your experience has been disregarded, questioned, marginalised, then passing is a whole new state which requires processing. The list of non-accepted masculinities can be extensive; non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender queer identities, ‘masculine femininities’… Were all those identities pieces of the social jigsaw in the 1985 America? I am pretty sure they were. Has the writer considered them? No. When making a claim that being a man is not a privilege, there needs to be -in my opinion- some comparison with what is ‘other’, because the possibilities are (a) someone else has the privilege, so the reader needs to be convinced about who possesses it, and (b) no-one is privileged, and thus all people are equal, which, however, would not account for the writer’s whining.

On Manliness and Writing (or, better, On Manliness and ‘the Life of the Mind’)

The writer of the essay, after having analysed the problems of manhood in America of his time, focuses on what seems to be a more important theme in his essay, that is how masculinity relates to writing. He points at the ‘incompatibility’ between ‘being a writer and being a man’, how his ‘wanting to become a writer was at odds’ with the ‘oppressive role-play of’ masculinity. And insists -just as in the beginning where he claimed that being a man means being ‘stupid’, ‘unfeeling’, ‘obedient’, ‘soldierly’ and to cease the process of ‘thinking’- that ‘everything in stereotyped manliness goes against the life of the mind’. Reading the slew of his claims (which are not satisfactorily developed) several thoughts rush through my mind.

To begin with, Theroux conflates fiction-writing with the sphere of intellect in general (‘the life of the mind’). This is a logical fallacy: intellect does not only include the domain of fiction-writing and conflating the intellectual sub-field of fiction-writing with intellect at large is a false equivalence. Intellect includes science, education, philosophy, writing… There are so many actualisations and manifestations of it. So, before proceeding to fiction writing, let’s take the opportunity this flaw in the writer’s logical reasoning provides us with, and think about the position of women in the literary world in general, in the world of the ‘letters’ that is, in science, education, philosophy… Starting with science, a google search for the most influential scientists of all time will possibly be a list with a lot of male (Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Pythagoras, Nicola Tesla) and very few female names (Marie Curie, Ada Lovelace). When it comes to philosophy, almost everyone knows Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, but very few indeed are aware of Diotima and Mantinea, or Hypatia. While there is a suggestion on Theroux’s side that his comments are on fiction-writing in particular (given that he is even separating journalism from literature, in order to show its most ‘serious’ and thus masculine character), however, his repetitive claim about men being ‘stupid’, expected to ‘stop thinking’ (alternate ways of saying the same thing found in the same line!), and manliness viewed as going ‘against to the life of mind’ are really general and definitely not focused on fiction-writing specifically. I found those hollow repetitions really misleading, and definitely unsuccessful in reversing male dominance in and female exclusion from the matters of knowledge.

Shifting our focus on literature and fiction-writing, Theroux’s thesis seems to be the following: fiction-writing as a more sentimental and passive activity is unmanly; it is only suitable for a man when it generates profit; and literature written by men needs to stand as an evidence of their manliness, since fiction-writing is not a traditionally masculine occupation. My reply to his claims will be in the form of questions, since I am not so knowledgeable as to have overpowering facts without necessary research. But still, I am wondering… Why is the literary canon dominated by men? Why won’t Virginia Woolf’s unnamed female narrator in her *Room of One’s Own* be admitted in a college library? Why does she showcase how women writers have been barred from the literary canon? And why wouldn’t Shakespeare’s name have seen the light of the literary day had he been a ‘Judith Shakespeare’ (she) and not a William Shakespeare? I also wonder how men and the acquisition of knowledge are incompatible, when in 2012 Malala Yousafzai was shot for activism related to female education? I also wonder: is every male literary figure in America’s history an instance of a fixated and unconscious attempt to prove his manliness in his work and through his life? Is Hemingway’s example adequate and accurately interpreted?

While further research is needed on my part to answer the above questions, I still have one last thought on the subject. While reading the essay, I thought about a recent read: Rachel Cusk. Some of the criticism she has received is targeted towards her writing about motherhood in an ‘unexpected’ way, revealing how a mother can view her children in the coldest of lights at times and under certain circumstances. That brings me to the point Theroux makes about female writers and the proof of their motherhood. It comes as shock to people when a woman casts off the veil of the all-loving mother. And that seems to hold truth also in our days. In comparison, I wonder if the male writer in our days needs to ‘achieve a muscular manhood’ through his writing.

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Journal #4 Rafford Pyke’s *What men like in men*

Reading Rafford Pyke’s *What Men Like in Men* from 1902 I was struck by a lot of things, the homophobia, the sexism, the nuanced homoeroticism that screamed “NO HOMO, THOUGH” in a deep staccato tone, but most of all I was left with a sense of pity for these men, for what a cruel joke it was and still is to be a manly man. This is a text that can in our day be read with bitter irony, as a sort of self-deconstructive statement about masculinity that at the same time explains, to some extent, why life for minorities was so terrible for most of the 20th century and still is today.

In the beginning of the essay, in a very nonchalant way, Puke establishes what to me seems to be the foundation of the issues surrounding masculinity as a treacherous plane of abjection and lopsided performativity. Men never questioned themselves in regards to their own psychology, they never wondered about why they like or hate certain things, why they behave in a specific way. That was the crowning glory of their privilege, that had never really been questioned. Men up until that period had been very secure in their patriarchal bubble where they were the only ones responsible for running the world. Slowly though, and in the 20th century accelerated by the cities becoming heavily populated by all sorts of people, alternatives were beginning to establish their own rights to exist. Mainly women becoming active in the professional world, acquiring new rights and making their own voices heard in a way that somewhat placed men in a position of accountability for their actions. And as it’s usually the case, when patriarchy is pressured it retaliates, it finds new ways to create binaries, new ways to establish supremacy. Thus, the creation of another Other. The Other, for whom Pyke devotes the greater part of his essay making a science out of dejecting them, the Sissy.

The Sissy becomes a stand-in for everything men do not like and shouldn't, or rather for everything that they’d wish to renounce and cast off of themselves in order to seem and feel superior. Pyke approaches the issue in a very dubious manner, attempting to create a science, “Sissyism”. The term inevitably reminds me of Sisyphus, like him the Sissies of the world are doomed to repeat almost mechanically the same actions, cast away, hidden in the crevices of society. Like him, they are pitted and hated, they are seen as the ultimate sinners, the ones whose lives are meaningless and unimportant. Yet like him, they are given a choice, to continue pushing that heavy bolder up the mountain only to watch it fall back again ad infinitum, or to stop. In either case it is they themselves that create meaning in their action. In essence, being a Sissy is a choice, a choice of negating the spiteful gaze, of rejecting the pity and hatred and either quitting the “show” or carrying on on your own terms. This is a level of emotional strength and tenacity that Pyke completely ignores, perhaps because it is beyond his own perception of Sissies. Remaining a Sissy in a world like that of the early 20th century and even ours is a bold choice, and to speak a language that Pyke and his bros would understand, it takes a lot of balls to be a Sissy.

Moving on in his essay Pyke establishes the characteristics of a Sissy, the physical and emotional/behavioural aspects of one. I have to say, I was not at all surprised with them. The majority of the attributes that for Pyke characterise a Sissy, this despicable, pointless, laughable creature, are shared by the stereotypical image of woman. The question then arises, does Pyke and men like him hate those attributes in a man because they’re not masculine and thus don’t belong there or do these qualities make the sissies more like women, more desirable, and ultimately a threat to their masculinity that needs to be ridiculed in order to lose some of its charm? It’s no secret after all that a lot of men enjoy having sex with Sissies, they enjoy their “hybrid” nature, behind closed doors of course. What is then the driving force for the abjection of the Sissy? Is it disgust? Is it shame for wanting them? Is it the fact that they confuse the binary categories? I think it’s a conglomeration of all these that shows how big of a fight men put up in order to maintain their violent hierarchies that protect them from scrutiny, keep men as men, women as women, and Sissies as jokes.

But Pyke does’t want Sissies to disappear, instead, he believes that the fulfil a necessary albeit infinitesimal role. They are accessories for women, their stylists, their botanists, and so much more, simply put, the gay best friend! A semi functioning substitute for a man, that is erased the minute an Alpha Male (I can’t believe I’m even using this term) appears! A devious plot that even incriminates women in this game of Othering people who share common attributes with them, making them oblivious to the fact that by partaking in this oppression they foster their own. An orphan Sissy, then, without their woman owner, becomes obsolete and even beyond that becomes the carrier of a “vague and insurmountable feeling of malaise” that brings about a “moral nausea”. This is, I believe, the part where Pyke’s little essay turns from laughable to dangerous! This is the very core of an ideology that has plagued the gay community, and although not all Sissies are gay and not all gay people are Sissies the truth of the matter remains. It is precisely because of this ideology, that countless of gay individuals have been “Justly” bullied, tormented, physically, sexually and emotionally abused, even murdered. This idea of the Sissy, as a danger, as a miasma, poisons the psyche of all Sissies, creating a dynamic of self-hatred, of self-renunciation, of dangerous behaviours, like drug use, bareback sex, cutting, self-sabotage. This is a poison that keeps getting pushed down every Sissy’s throat, that they don’t belong anywhere, that they are obsolete, useless, dangerous, unfit for society. This is the poison that in the 1980s and 1990s murdered all the wonderful Sissies with AIDS, and still does. The poison that Ronald Reagan spilled when he ignored and even laughed at the AIDS epidemic simply because it was thought it only affected the Sissies who took it up the ass. At this point in his essay Pyke has fully created an image of the Sissy, as a virus, a pet, nature’s joke and has given license to all the people who think similarly to express their opinions and to continue the chain of devaluing and dejecting the Sissies, a chain that has yet to be broken.

After this passionate rejection of the Sissy, as the thing par excellence that men don’t like, Pyke seems to have run out of steam as he moves into the part of the essay that one would think would be his central idea, namely “What Men Like in Men”. He very economically names a number of qualities that a man should have, creating a convoluted web of adjectives and qualities that all support each other in a very precarious balance that seems to me like a train wreck you can’t stop looking at, at the same time pitying the dead men and laughing at them.

First and foremost, for Pyke, men like men who are “square”, with a “sense of honour”. He evokes ideas of “fair play” to support this argument, ideas that completely contradict his polemic up until this point. I don’t see any “honour”, or “fair play” in his demonisation of effeminate men, nor in indoctrinating women in their own oppression. Pyke believes that the behaviour that holds everything together is justice but it’s not the regular kind of justice one would find in court, the one that’s debatable or at least not always final, no, that would simply be too Sissy-esque. Trying to hold his stance together, Pyke brings God, as the ultimate transcendental signifier, to the foreground. Justice then for Pyke becomes, the word of the Father, the patriarchal word that rules supreme and must never be questioned or challenged. But I’d like to go back to the shape he chooses to encapsulates all this nonsense, the square! Pyke chooses the most boring and heteronormative of all shapes, one that is equally balanced from top to bottom and left to right, predictable and reliable but not exciting like the majestic triangle or the mysterious circle. Perhaps those shapes are Sissies for him, too. Ιt’s a square, not even a trapezoid, nothing must be out of center or imbalanced, he needs to evoke an image of stability, of being meticulous, and scrupulous, otherwise his whole thing will collapse. (And it’s very fragile.)

Closing out his incredible essay, after delving into not making a fuss out of small things as a necessary component of a well-liked man (and we’ve all seen how men react to a common cold or to North Macedonia), Pyke puts the cherry on top of this toxic cake with an outrageous double standard. According to him, the best liked men have feminine traits within them, but not too many because that would make one effeminate. What that means is that there is a right way to be feminine and a wrong way, this final move makes the injury of everything said so far even more severe. Showing how male power reigns supreme, being able to contradict its now logic at whim and to choose who is a man and who is a Sissy based on an arbitrary and unfounded set of characteristics and behaviours.

Throughout his text Pyke uses the goal of the positive reaffirmation of masculinity as a facade for a homophobic, sexist, femmephobic ideology that aims to create the image of an Other, the Sissy, to signify by proxy how superior true masculine men are. This is an attempt that sits comfortably on the throats of countless feminine men, using them as a springing board into dominance. Pyke constructs a game of mirrored signification that although imagines itself as independent and “never consciously assertive” is completely dependent on the existence of the Sissies as second grade male individuals. And in its laughable pride neglects to take into account the issue of choice. To keep carrying the rock, to stop, or to to smash it over their heads.

**Mavroulias Charis (1563201700016)**

**Sissies, Trannies and other traitors to masculinity**

“What men admire in men” is a question that Rafford Pyke had difficulty in answering back in 1902, trying to figure out what men did not like in other men – kind of like Aristotle- to finally observe what traits they actually do find attractive (traits we would expect from someone sorted to the Griffindor house of Hogwarts). And if this question puzzled an author 120 years ago, today, taking into consideration how our perception of manhood is highly influenced by modelling industries, popular magazines, K-Pop figures, YouTube influencers and more, this question might be even impossible to answer within a few paragraphs or would need a complete reformation to surpass its limitations and biases.

To begin with, what a modern reader would expect as an answer to “What men like in men” would probably simply be “other men”! In this case, what in Pyke’s article would allude to an admiration, traits worth seeking in a friend, the verb *like*, now becomes literal, as to same “sex” attraction. And with homosexuality having been depathologized since 1973, more and more individuals would be likely to discuss what they find attractive in men, physically and/or mentally. And while Pyke makes very few references to the external characteristics of the “good sissy”, a modern man who experiences sexual attraction could go as far as enumerating all the different categories of queer men, according to their age, colour, body hair and body structure – possibly as presented in Grinder- and then explain which of these types and tribes he prefers. Of course, the distinction between the good and the bad *Sissy* still remains unresolved in the mind of a cis hetero Conservative (White) male, the first being a generally masculine man, whose sexuality and personal life is not to be discussed, and the second, the *Twink,* which is basically any effeminate version of a masculine individual, a traitor to manhood.

The answer to the initial question becomes even more complicated when trans men and women are brought into the conversation, ungratefully denning masculinity and provocatively laying claims to it, accordingly. On the one hand, trans women should not even be mentioned in the first place, but since in the minds of many it’s the *phallus* that makes a person a man, they are trapped between social denial of their identity or fetishization because of their anatomy, something very much preserved and reproduced by the porn industry. On the other hand, trans men are a “last minute call” to this discussion but in this case, if they dare claim the privilege of *passing* and especially, *straight passing,* they could possibly reach the top of the food chain, envied even by cis men, as Judith Halberstam’s “masculine competitors”, “with the potential to unseat the white male”... as long as no one knows what’s going on *down there.*

But the thing is, that nowadays, both sexuality and gender are accepted as a spectrum, with many different possibilities or combinations lying in between the binaries, and also very much influenced by gender expression, making society’s irrational need to classify masculinities quite futile. And this futility becomes even more ironic when the same person is read and “evaluated” differently at the same period of time, provoking attraction and admiration or repulsion and humiliation. I cannot help but recall these two days when I was at the early stages of my medical transition : I was on the bus and constantly being asked by a man if I was one of *those (*traitors to manhood), not being a creep to stare at the girls around me. A few days later, I was out with a friend for drinks and they commented on how gently and tenderly I slid my credit card over the P. O. S.(like a good Twink).

**Pissari Zinovia (1563201800290)**

(To the Men in my life … young and old)

It got me thinking … that is for sure. Being a feminist at heart and training it has been very difficult to accept Man as much more than a victimizer, an oppressor, a representative of the patriarchal status quo. So, when I found out I was having a boy my feelings were quite mixed. Girls “run” in my immediate and extended family … yet I was carrying a boy, I was nurturing … the other. That is what got me thinking of this other not as the enemy, but as a person in the making, a human being.

Obviously I am not a man and I do not pretend to understand the particulars of manliness as ‘an ill-fitting coat’ and what a burden it must be to have to adjust to, let alone sustain, such a mentally, emotionally and socially ‘crippling lie’, as Theroux argues in “Being a Man”. However, I can now imagine … My “little” boy is not so “little” anymore … he is at the threshold of puberty and it has been, and still is, my job to help him become a man … hopefully a different kind of man. If being a man is not a privilege but an unmerciful and punishing burden, then what kind of Man would I want to see him become? (What kind of Man must I fight for him to be able to become is more like it … as I DO have to – even at this young age – remind him that it is OK to cry when you hurt because boys cry too, despite what his grandfather tells him all the time; that it is OK to be tender and loving towards nature and animals; that it is OK to be different, that it is a gift, and that he should protect and defend difference and respect the way he differs from others because that is what makes him special, despite what his friends might think; that it is OK to set the table, to learn how to cook, to tidy his room and help out with household chores because that teaches him how to be independent, self-sufficient and better equipped to live on his own when that time comes – and it will come, despite his grandmother’s insistence that these are not activities that Men should be involved in. )

If manliness is as grotesque as Theroux describes it then it is, I suppose, my job to bring forth a man who will know that manliness is nothing more than being human, not a goal to reach but a path to carve, perhaps “the one [still] less travelled by”, but, still, just one path. As an adult, a mother, a woman, a feminist I am four times removed from his reality, but, at the same time, because of all these factors, I feel I need to try four times harder to be there and understand his pressures and feelings. I guess I am lucky that he equally enjoys playing basketball and the violin; that he studies with interest both Science and Literature; that he wants to go to University while at the same time he thoroughly enjoys and is very inquisitive about practical matters like fixing his bike, or mending our front door handle which often becomes unhinged; that he enjoys playing Fortnite with his friends as much as he enjoys playing “family” or “rescue team” with his sister. I know all this does not sound as much, but, I must admit, I consider them small victories in this supposed “War of the Sexes”, which is longer, more devastating and with more casualties than all the wars in history combined (including the fictional and cinematic ones). The War is nowhere near over, it is there, it is ongoing and it is long-lasting woven as it is in the very fabric of the matrix of our social reality. I keep telling him that we ARE our choices and that there is always a choice of who you want to be… I, and his father is my ally and supporter in this process, tell him that NO means NO in any context, that our partners and friends should be listened to and respected, that we should be the change we want to see in the world, that nothing is a given, that Men should know how to change diapers and sing lullabies and cook meals, because, and I will agree with Michael Dorris on that, being a parent is a full-time job for both parents and though tiring, even exasperating at times, it is the joyride of a lifetime and he should not miss out on any of that “chasing waterfalls” instead (TLC style and in general).

“Ask questions. Ask WHY, even well beyond that nightmarish time between 2 and 5 when you have to know WHY everything … (why we eat vegetables, why we share our toys, why people die, why is it hot in the summer, why children cannot drive real cars, why girls pee differently, why we have to go the doctor, why mommy was crying, why you can’t always have it your way). Never take anything for granted, because we are all humans and we make mistakes and sometimes the world is not what we thought it would be after the choices we made, but we can change it and try to fix and if we fail … which we most probably will … we can ask WHY and try again”. That is the one advice any parent can give any child of any sex. Take nothing for granted and make your life and create your world by asking WHY and giving YOUR answer to the question and then maybe, just maybe, what Michael Dorris said might come to be and be tested … ‘The goal should be to find an equitable pattern that satisfies all parties rather than one that simply conforms to a generic sitcom plot’. Life is no sitcom … but it is no tragedy either, it is a path … and at the end we (both men and women) should be able to tell with a sigh (hopefully of relief) that

“I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference”.

**Giannopoulou Foteini (1563201700031)**

After reading Michael Dorris’s essay on his experience with active parenting I can safely make this point: this reality is still quite far from the Greek reality. I am only 21 years old and I would never imagine my parents switching roles in bringing me up. I might have grown up in a particularly conservative environment but I am certain this still holds true for the vast majority of Greek families. For the most part, the father is the provider and the mother is the caretaker and while they might help each other out in either expenses or housework, the average nuclear family doesn’t show much flexibility. The father’s masculinity and the mother’s femininity, which for whatever reason are to be protected as virtues of outmost social importance, depend on the preservation of these roles. Dorris shows us what men are missing by maintaining this rigid role, how the process of raising kids offers emotional development, gratification, excitement and how to nurture means to be nurtured. Men are clearly missing on a wonderful and life-changing experience, but they are not alone in this process. Dorris’s essay made me wonder: what are the children missing?

First of all, it is important to note that the experience is rarely ever the same for the girl as it is for the boy. There always has to be an invisible barrier between the world of men and the world of women and we learn to acknowledge this from early on; the father might spend considerably more time with his son, teach him things forbidden to the girl, see more of himself on him and have more ambitious dreams about him. While the girl might be scolded more rarely or be shown greater affection, in truth she meets a kind of detachment and lack of real quality time with her father. If we take the example of a girl without a brother, we might witness another peculiar occurrence: the father might bond with his girl as he would for a son, for a while, maybe in spite of her mother, teach her “boyish” games and skills, transfer to her “masculine” virtues and aspirations. When the girl eventually reaches an age when “girly” matters interest her more or when her mother, other relatives and friends conclude that it should be so, the father ultimately gives up and realizes that he just wanted a son to begin with. It is funny how this issue is sustained way into adulthood: when a woman has her own family, she is detached from her previous one, but when a man has a family, he simply continues his father’s legacy.

All in all, no matter the kid’s gender, quality time with the parent is important. When a kid consistently bonds with one parent but hardly ever spends time with the other one, the family dynamic is automatically unbalanced. The internalization of this unbalanced dynamic is critical, especially considering that the absent or near-absent parent is more than often the father. As an example, growing up, the daughter might take as given the fact that men cannot offer her much sincere communication or emotional security or sincerely open up to her and that their care can just be expressed through providing for the material. On the other hand, the son might feel obligated to bottle up his emotions, to never show affection so much as his lover and to equate success with his ability to build wealth. Even though this is clearly an overgeneralization, it is not far from reality for many people, at least to my experience.

Needless to say, children are highly adaptable and their emotional needs do not necessarily correlate with social norms. Specialists confirm that a kid can grow up perfectly fine with a single parent, so long as they are provided with a steady routine, consistent environment and emotional security. That being said, growing up with a single parent cannot be equated with growing up with two parents out of which one is unavailable. For once, it doesn’t have to be this way. If the child can receive double the amount of affection, double the knowledge, double the encouragement, why shouldn't it be the case? It is not a matter of spending an x number of hours per day with them or retiring from one’s job to make them happy. Michael Dorris still achieved a wonderful career while enjoying his daughters’ unique childhoods and many other fathers with a tighter time schedule can still list their children’s quirks and preferences with as great detail as he did. To believe still, in this year, that because a father does not push a kid out, he cannot possibly form a strong connection with it, or that because he sets an example for his son, he has to act out the role of a permanently dissociating superhero crying sweat instead of tears, is criminal, to say the least. Depriving one’s kid of acts of love and affection just to maintain some arbitrary social construct might just be one of the reasons our society still lacks empathy and understanding and therefore should be reconsidered with great care.

**Tsompanaki Eftichia (201800297)**

This was a hard journal to tackle. All the previous ones poured out of me because the material produced in me a gut reaction. I loved *Fried Green Tomatoes*, I was shaken by Salazar and the *Sarcophagus* I really got. But all these men have me somewhat confused. Two are the main thoughts that stuck with me: 1) I liked the texts (Dorris’, Pyke’s, Theroux’s in ascending order) but that’s just it, I simply liked them, and 2) where is the male counterpart of the lesbian continuum?

With Dorris I have a little bone to pick because, of all things, what I minded was the fact that he did not introduce his adoptive children as he did his biological offspring. Other than that, it sounded true enough and I could relate but in the way I can relate to characters in a film; I can see how life is busy when interviewing nannies, packing lunches, securing child care and being a professional of your own right. The piece by Pyke I enjoyed because it “read” well researched; it felt written by a keen observer of their own life. However, each one of the virtues he mentioned felt universal, no way can they be attributed to men alone. If I can mess with his words: “What then is the conclusion? (Women) like in (women) these traits: (…) (honor, justice, reasonableness, courage, generous instinct, modesty, dignity, fineness, tenderness). But when one thinks of it more carefully, may (they) not sum it up in just a single sentence, and accept it as truth, that all (women) like (a woman who is not a ‘bitch’)”? And this got me thinking… Why is there a negative there? Not be a bitch… Because there is no word to attribute all these fine qualities to a woman; there is no corresponding term for a gentleman in the female gender. And isn’t it strange that we choose to define somebody by using a negative? And isn’t this what Pyke did by uniting all men in their dislike towards a Sissy? Is he not prejudiced against his own gender the same way I am prejudiced against mine by asking that the finest specimen not be a bitch? Theroux made the most sense, suffocating in the “assigned” little suit that is put on boys from day one which they are not allowed to get out of until they leave this world for the next one. I have always felt a little sorry for men who have to prove to others how macho they are, who have to be ‘hunters’ of women and ‘gatherers’ of wealth to be held in high regard and if I am being honest, a piece of my soul dies when I hear men in their 30s or 40s saying that the way to marital bliss is saying yes to the ‘little lady’/wife. Stereotype much?

Where is their philosophy? Are there Men’s Studies? You will say it is the history of the entire world, but is it really? What is it that unites men as a gender other than the preconceptions about patriarchal society? Don’t get me wrong, I am not disputing its existence, I am simply thinking that maybe it is high time, at this day and age, we rose above or simply assumed a new perspective, one that sees the world in its entirety inhabited by distinct humans who matter as individuals before we have them studied, judged, grouped, thought of as morons, bitches, gentlemen, Ladies with a capital l, hetero-, homo- or whatever other –sexuals are out there.

Men are just as complex as we wish to see them. Often in the struggle to show that women don’t have it good, we seem to forget that men don’t have it good either. Have they not suffered enough you think to come up with their own male continuum? Do they not need it? Is it an oversight? Or is it indeed out there waiting to be discovered? Historically, women have been at the bottom of the human pyramid which they will continue to inhabit because changes take ages. However, historically men have been led to believe that the top of the pyramid is rightfully theirs and all they need to do is prove to other men that they deserve it. Equally sad, is it not? Unless one wishes to be escorted to their appointed seat in the world, fasten their seat belt and take the journey to a preselected destination. “Thank you for travelling with ‘Stereotypes Airlines’, we will be happy to also see your offspring in one of our next flights. We hope you enjoyed your trip to No-out-of-the-box-thinking-ville”!