

# The Other Side of the Story: Women's Literature



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## *THE LEGACY by Virginia Woolf*

I just reread the short story "The Legacy" by Virginia Woolf and like the first time I enjoyed it alot. As it was one of the first women's literature text I read, i had no idea what to expect. The story surprised me in that way because I had been expecting something completely different. I thought that in women's literature the contents would always be fairly similar: Women being repressed and liberating themselves from their situation by acting in a very emancipated way. This was only partly the case in The Legacy. The female main character Angela does in some was free herself from the rigid borders the society of her time has set up around her but in a completely diferent way than I had expected. Gilbert, Angela's husband and an influential politician, fell slightly more into my stereotype women's literature register. He is indeed very self-confident, self-centered and short-sighted for right until the end he has no clue how his wife could possibly have had a reason to kill herself. I don't think that he ever imagines her doing that anyways. This is what I meant by short-sighted. He is so sure of Angela's love and admiration for him that he stays completely oblivious of the change in her character and her ast desperate step. He doesn't see her as an equal human at all. He treats her more like a pet, or a stupid little child you only tend to when it suits you. She is his shining trophy on the mantel piece that the admires from time to that but that fades into oblivion when he has more important things on his mind. Angela, Gilbert's wife, on the other didn't really seem like a typical women's literature character. Only when she takes her life to free herself from all her social responsibilites and her probably unhappy marriage to join her beloved one does she turn into something like a femine hero. In generly she is described as rather naiv. She seems to admire Gilbert, but I couldn't tell if there was real affection behind that. Probably if she hadn't met B.M., her secret love, she would have stayed in the unhappy marriage with Gilbert until her death; like a pretty little bird in a tiny silver cage. Another reason for Angela so willingly following B.M. into death is that Gilbert absolutely didn't respect her wishes and feelings. She speaks about having children and starting to work and all that her replies is that she shouldn't bother her pretty little head with such trivialities. Of course she knows what social pressure lies on her and thats why she believes that death is the only solution.

## Additional

## Notes:

B.M. is the character only mentioned through Angela's letters. He is not rich, nor is he used to servants. He's a socialist and challenges Angela mentally and regards her as an equal. I think that this is what Angela loves most about him. He was relatively sympathetic to me at the beginning of the story but from the moment where he threatens Angela to kill himself if she doesn't do what he wants her to do he sank even below  
Gilbert...

I'm really looking forward to Woolf's second story.

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### *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN by Virginia Woolf*

This story, an excerpt out of a speech I believe, by Virginia Woolf, goes more into the direction of what I imagined women's literature to be like. Woolf speaks about how women were treated over time. She was asked to give a lecture on women and fiction. With that she means both the fiction that women write and also the fiction that is written about women. The first thing she states is that a woman must have money and a room of her own to be able to write fiction. She wanted to find out more about how women lived and how they were treated in the past. One thing she says is, in my opinion very true. Woolf states that: the work of suffering human beings are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses they live in. I think that even though Woolf wrote this speech more than eighty years ago this fact is still true. If you do not have the means to write, and by that I don't mean the ideas that accumulate in one's head, but rather the money and earthly things like food and a safe place to live, a person can be extremely talented in any kind of way, may it be poetry, art, anything really, that person will not succeed in what they are best at. What also shocked me a lot was what Woolf wrote about the conditions of women in the 16th century. That they were married off against their will I knew. I didn't know that it was legal for their father or husband or any male being to abuse her physically by e.g. beating her. Another interesting aspect is the theory that Shakespeare was a woman. I've heard about that before and we also discussed it briefly in the course but I had never seen this theory from the side Woolf portrays it. I think that she could be right. Women at that time might have had the brilliance that Shakespeare had but they certainly had no possibility to ever show or prove that. Women at that time could barely write, they had neither the means nor the audience to write something like the works of Shakespeare. Like she says: that genius is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. The last thing that I thought was interesting concerning Woolf's speech was that women were often forced to write without mentioning their real name or sex. I hope that this is not true anymore in our times but I

can imagine that it was still like that in 1928 when Virginia Woolf gave that speech.

### Additional

### Notes:

After having talked over this text again in class I realized more profoundly the difference between the roles played of the women at that time in real life and the women's role in literature. Like Woolf says it is completely unlikely that there should have been a female writer at that time when they had so many other things that occupied their time and mind. Due to this it stings more in the heart that the women's role in literature was so glorified at that time. Always so far out of reach of real women at that time that life must have been very miserable.

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## A PAIR OF SILK STOCKINGS by Kate Chopin

I really enjoyed this story, especially the way it is written, although I think that it is very predictable. At the beginning when "little Mrs. Sommers" unexpectedly has 15 dollars to spend, I could really see her in front of my eyes. A little stout woman bustling about to provide for her children, always making sure that they get her children get the best the family can afford and always putting herself in second place. To me she seemed like a completely selfless person. You can also tell that when she is lucky enough to possess any money it is not a lot. She says that 15 dollars are a large amount of money and even remarks that they make a bulge in her purse. Another aspect that you can immediately interpret from the first paragraph is that Mrs. Sommers wasn't always as poor as she is now. This is underlined when it says that she had had better days before she had become Mrs. Sommers. Maybe this means that before her marriage she had been wealthier but this didn't seem to bother her at all. She must have married out of love knowing that the marriage would be economically inconvenient. Her selflessness is really clear in the way she treats her children. With the fifteen dollars she wants to only buy things for her children not considering any of her own wishes. I knew that this would never be enough for a whole story so it was kind of clear that the story had to have a twist. This twist was introduced quite clearly: But that day she was a little faint and tired. To me the "but" already signaled very clearly that she was about to do something she normally wouldn't do. The turn of the story was completely obvious when she abandoned all her former principles and started looking at silk stockings. She simply couldn't resist the temptation. I think that buying the stockings started a kind of chain reaction in her with which she released the different longings piled up in her over a long period of time. I think that it must have been like a fuse burning through and making her selfish all at once. The next day she probably really regretted buying all those expensive things only for herself when the money could have been spent much better on something for the family. Buying those things seems like an act of rebellion to me. Something short-lived but still very passionate that could have happened to her anytime. Since her husband is never really mentioned I came to the conclusion that she was a widow. If this was the case then the pressure on her must have been very big and therefore I think that this one selfish act doesn't make her a bad person.

### Additional Notes:

A very interesting detail I only noticed last time in class when we talked about it - the symbolism of the serpent. When you think about it it really is a very obvious sign for

temptation, sin and seduction and this fits perfectly into the story.

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### ***STORY OF AN HOUR by Kate Chopin***

Wow!!! The story "A Story of An Hour" by Kate Chopin was the last story I read this week. After having already read the other story by Kate Chopin I was expecting something similar to "A Pair of Silk Stockings" only to be completely surprised. I absolutely love the story. The way the author leads you onto a wrong path, has you grieving with young Mrs. Mallard and then rejoicing with her in her newly won freedom only to get a heart attack too. The style the story is written in, the way that you think you fully understand it and that you know what is coming in amazing. You can tell that Mrs. Mallard wasn't really happy with her marriage and that she desperately wanted something to give her the opportunity to free herself from it. The one unforeseen opportunity she got was snatched out of her hands only minutes after she had victoriously embraced it. I absolutely love the way Chopin has you tied to the page with every word she writes and how realistic she made her characters seem. To me surprising stories are the most interesting stories. They wrap you up and possess you. I would really like to read another story by Chopin to see if her other stories are more like "A Pair of Silk Stockings" or rather like this one. =)

#### **Additional Notes:**

I just found my favorite sentence in the text: "There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself." I think that this sentence shows best how talented Chopin is when it comes to surprising her readers. The first part of the sentence is extremely sad but those five simple words that follow change the whole meaning and make it full of joy and excitement.

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### ***SWEAT by Zora Neale Hurston***

What an unsettling story "Sweat" is! In the introduction about the author Zora Neale Hurston there was already an hint at the contents of the story but still it is always very sad and disturbing to read or hear something about a woman being abused. Although "Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin still remains my favorite story "Sweat" is also high in my esteem. In the short autobiography I mentioned above it said that Hurston had an amazing ability to draw women characters who are both believable and inspiring and this proved to be absolutely true in "Sweat". The main character Delia Jones is really someone a woman can identify with and therefore it touched me even more to read about her awful life.

The short story starts off with a short description on Delia's life saying that she is

a washwomen and that she is an well-organized and conscientious woman. She is also displayed as a very hard-working woman even working on Sundays after church when most people tend to relax.

The entrance of her husband, Sykes completely reveals his bad character from the first second on. No loving man would ever enter the house to scare his wife and then laugh at her fright! What makes it worse is that he uses the thing against her which he knows most effective to frighten her to death – snakes. He doesn't actually thrust a snake at her face, instead he puts his bull whip over her shoulder. When the author mentions whip everything in me contracted in me. Even though this is only mentioned in the third paragraph of the story Hurston had already established a character that I feared.

His reaction to frightening her shows that he takes pleasure in seeing her scare and when he kicks her work around the room it is obvious that he also like to provoke her and fight with her, maybe to give himself a reason to beat her up.

Delia herself is a believer; she goes to church and tries to reproach her husband in saying that his behavior is a sin. Sykes doesn't give a damn on anything she has to say. He criticizes, threatens, mocks and beats her for his own pleasure.

Delia is portrayed as having once been a thin fragile, young, soft girl before her wedding with Sykes. She is still skinny fifteen years later though her hands are harsh and knotty and her limbs knotty and muscled. This is what Sykes hates about her. He regularly mentions that he despises thin woman and tells Delia she's so thin he's afraid of cutting himself on her sharp edges.

That one night Delia opposes Sykes and refuses to do his bidding. She tries to fight back and grabs an iron tool from the kitchen to defend herself from her brutal husband. She cries out in despair that she is sick of working her hand blooding only to have Sykes through the money out the window by handfuls. This sort of awed Sykes and her departs.

Delia remembers that before her marriage she actually loved Sykes and that she indeed married out of love, Sykes on the other hand married for sex or because she was the only girl that would have him. The sad thing is that the beating already started two months after the wedding and never ceased afterwards. But Delia is resolved to change her situation without having to give up her comfortable house. Another facet to the story which makes it only more cruel and sad is that Sykes is betraying Delia with a horribly fat woman and the whole city knows about it. They pity Delia and say that she had once been a very pretty girl before he husband flogged everything out of her.

As already mentioned Sykes mainly lives on Delia's hard earned money and instead of being grateful he spends it all on the other woman and because he loves hurting Delia so much he does it right in front of her eyes. He even pays the room where his fat lady lives.

The ultimate step he takes to provoke her is putting a real rattle snake into her soap box. She being petrified of the animal bids him to remove it but he refuses; rejoicing once again in her fear. Delia finally speaks the truth out loud, calm and right into his face. She says that she now hates him as much as she used to love him before. This is sad because it means that she must have really loved Sykes a lot before. I was glad that this story ended unlike many of the other stories we have read before – with the female heroine dying (in vain). I felt gratified that finally a man had gotten his due punishment and the woman had survived it.

The only thing that sort of leaves me puzzled is the fact that I cannot completely make sense of the ending. I know that Delia knows that her husband is dying but I'm not sure whether she would have had the possibility to save him. I can nevertheless somehow understand her conduct because having been treated so horribly for over fifteen years she acted in a natural way. Nobody would save their own punisher from death if that would mean that your own punishment will continue till you yourself die.

#### Additional notes:

We talked a lot about this particular short story during the last lesson. I like the way we analyze the stories together so that I can later add all the interesting new information to my texts in this journal. This is very useful so that I can have a wonderful journal in the end. We set up a list of suitable adjectives for Delia and I think I'll just enter my favorite and the most useful word into this diary. I think that the words benevolent, passionate and patient are the most adequate. Delia is benevolent because at the beginning she thinks about everybody else before considering her own needs.

I also liked analyzing the hidden information in a story. The things that you only notice when you read conscientiously and carefully. The best part was the symbolism. I would have never guessed that the snakes in the story symbolize the male penis. Delia's fear of snakes is at the same time a fear of male sexuality, maybe even male sexual abuse. The snake is a symbol of power to Sykes. Delia has probably never had any positive experiences with sexuality. I don't think that Sykes is a very tender and gentle person in bed. That's why Delia fears snakes and through that sexuality.

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#### ***BEAUTY: WHEN THE OTHER DANCER IS THE SELF by Alice Walker***

After having finished the story I have a major question. What does the title have to do with the content of the story? Maybe I didn't read carefully enough, or I'm just too stupid to get Alice Walker's subliminal hints.

Before reading the story I read the introduction on the author. And when I compared that information with the short story the similarities were overwhelming. I think that the story is completely autobiographic because she

even uses the same names as in real life.

What I really like is the description of things Alice likes. You can actually feel her devotion to her father. Her admiration of the “fat, funny man with beautiful eyes and a subversive wit”. Come to think about it maybe Walker already hid her first hint to the continuation of the story in that sentence. She mentions her father’s beautiful eyes probably something that she loved particularly about him. This could be a hint at her own eyes. Her dad must have been her favorite because with two-and-a-half she says that she wants to go everywhere her daddy goes. Her mother plays a minor role in the whole story. She is the character who takes care of the children, works hard and suffers from an ear abscess.

Concerning the lady that owned the land and house Alice’s family lives in she makes a big distinction. She talk of the rich old WHITE lady with a certain distance which could be respect or simply lack of interest.

At the beginning Alice’s father wants to take some of his children to the county fair and Alice is lucky enough to get chose. Like a child the emphasis in this paragraph lingers on trivial and naïve details that are so common in children’s way of thinking and speaking.

The story continues in a chronological narrative of her childhood. Alice is a cute little girl of five and the only thing she wants to do is please people. She wants everyone to say that she’s the cutest, most adorable thing they’ve ever seen. The whole focus of her existence lies on her appearance, her beauty and her dress.

The transition to the next part is a real success.

“It was great fun being cute. But then, one day, it ended.”

Alice turns into a tomboy and one of her brothers accidentally shoots her in the eye with a toy pistol. Her eye turns white and scarred and she can no longer see anything with it.

Alice herself perceives this as the worst thing that could have happened to her in her life. She abhors her “glob” as she calls it. Her family doesn’t seem to notice any change about her.

Alice perceives the loss of her eye as the loss of her self-confidence and beauty. What bothers her most is what she looks like. This also effects her school career. Formerly she had been very good in school, but the injury of her eye and the fact that she has to move to a different place with her family turn her into a poor student. She is mobbed at school and finally is sent back to her old school where she perform better due to the love of a special teacher.

In the text she says that her favorite brother is Bill. It also says that it is this Bill who takes her to the hospital and has the “glob” removed. The means everything to her. From then on she believes that she is becoming a different person. She

gets a boyfriend and lots of friends; she graduates as valedictorian (What is that?), is most popular student and queen.

She turns into a thoroughly successive woman and in the end she makes peace with her eye.

What I don't understand are the last two paragraphs about her brother and the accident and about the desert. I hope we'll talk about that tomorrow.

Concerning the language, I would call the way the story is written leisurely. The language isn't too hard and it is fluid and easy to read and understand.

In general: I liked the story and I might even read *The Color Purple*.

### Additional

### Notes:

I liked the way we tried to find moods or feeling that fit to the various passages of the text. Through this one could really see how Alice Walker evolved in the course of her life. At first she is this young sassy, self-confident girl with a load of pride. One single incident in her childhood changes her life so drastically that she seems to fall into something like a deep black hole. She won't look up anymore and lacks self-esteem. We talked about a lot of things in class but what I think is really sad is that the family never notices the depression the girl falls into. I think that she really felt alone and lost during that time and desperately wanted someone to help her relieve the burden but nobody seemed to notice her inner anguish. Something that was very new about the story was that even though the family is black and not very wealthy they seem to be extremely happy. The mother is the steady foundation of the family - strong and proud. All the members must really love each other since Alice doesn't once resent her brothers for having destroyed her eye.

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### *FEAR OF FLYING by Erica Jong*

The content of the beginning of the story is completely different from the subject treated in the later part of the short story.

The story starts off with a woman flying (probably) from New York to Vienna with her husband and a plane full of other psychoanalysts to a conference dealing with the subject of the flight of Freud from Austria during the Nazi regime. She has immense fear of flying and even though her husband, also a psychoanalyst, holds her hand her fingers, toes and nose turn to ice, her nipples stand up and her stomach convulses. She believes that the laws of aerodynamics are flimsy superstitions and that she has to mentally help the pilot keep the plane aloft. She describes her fellow passengers, some of which she has had to shrink because of eating disorders during her youth, problems with her first husband... Already at the beginning she is extremely sarcastic and cynical. She makes fun of the shrinks

and their wives and even their children.

Obviously she is accompanying her husband because she was asked to write something satirical about the ongoing of the Congress. Talking about this she sort of falls into a rant about analysts. She says that they interpret crazy things into the most obvious and normal things one can think of. She describes that sometimes a marriage can turn out so ruined that both partners have an analyst and they can't decide one single thing without consulting their shrink. The perversion of this situation is made very clear by her detailed description.

Only once the woman actually describes herself. She says that she is phallic, castrating and narcissistic which is probably going overboard but which illustrated her sarcastic nature.

This is where the actual feminine writer part comes out clearly. She talks about her marriage going really wrong and that she and her husband were leading lives that ran parallel like train tracks. He works almost all of the time either in the hospital, his office... and that she also barely has time since she teaches and writes. The irritating thing for her is that she has fantasies about other men, that her marriage had turned monotonous and that she longs for action, wild sex and other crazy things her husband can't give her. The thing she wants most is sex. But no romantic sex with love and hearts and candles... but quite hot sex with almost strangers.

One of the reasons she gives as an explanation for her being so ashamed of wanting this is the influence of the American dream, of American ads, love songs... They tell you that if you follow all the guidelines you'll meet your Prince Charming. Even if you're clever you still have this dream haunting the remote corners of your brain. In America you are expected to marry and then desire no other men after that. When you do you end in a fit of self-hatred.

Another thing the woman criticizes is that men are allowed and can live alone but that it is made almost completely impossible for women to do so. Solitude is un-American. A woman living her life alone is never left in peace by other people always reminding her of the lack of a husband or children until she believes it herself.

What the woman actually wants is something she calls a zipless fuck. You should not get to know the man very well. As soon as you do the passion disappears. A zipless fuck should be brief and preferably anonymous. The writer then gives an example of a perfect zipless fuck. It passes as swift as a dream; the man doesn't start complaining about all his problems, preferably there is no talk at all. There is no power game, no giving and taking, nothing one has to prove, nothing you have to find out about the other person. For the woman a zipless fuck is the purest thing ever.

The content of the story was interesting, as was the way of thinking of the main character. I didn't like the vulgar way the woman sometimes thinks and the

twisted ways in which she talks about marriage and love. Maybe my dreams and wishes are still too string for me to want to accept that marriage might really end like this.

The only thing that i really had to ask myself was: What the hell is the sense behind this story? What is the author trying to tell me? and what is the rest of the book about.

#### Additional Notes:

The most interesting fact that I have to add to my journal entry after our discussion was the thing about ID and SUPEREGO. Our discussion put another very psychological aspect to the story and now that we talked about it I can see it too. The author puts in feelings and wishes from both the ID, that acts in an instinctive way without much reflection and also the Super Ego that wants to get rid of the complicatedness. I still think that the story is rather weird and I would definitely not read the whole book.

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### *DOWNTOWN by Anne Rivers Siddons*

The language of this short story is beautiful from the first paragraph. I love novels or texts where they use language that you can see before your eyes; that sounds poetic and beautiful. I love the way Siddons says: "...the keeping of a promise that hung in the bronze air like fruit on the eve of ripeness." Or "They met, of course they did; they met, and came together in pairs and groups and broke apart and reformed, like patterns in a kaleidoscope." I could give tons of other examples. The only thing that bothered me a little is the lack of content. I have no idea what the cook is about. The only thing I know is that it has something to do with hippies, because someone else told me so. Otherwise I wouldn't have had a single clue how the text continues.

Something that is for sure is that a man named Liam O'Donnell brings his daughter to town with his car. Her name is Maureen Aisling O'Donnell alias Smoky. She has five brothers: John, James, Patrick, Sean and Terry and her mother is dead. Her family, above all her mother, are extremely religious Catholics and her dad is afraid that Atlanta would spoil his little girl.

There is also a long part describing her father and I don't know what to make of it. On one side she talks of her father as the head of her family whose "savage hand" (?) lies heavy on all of them (probably her family). On the other hand she says that she no longer loves her father but that she can remember that she did love him once. I really wonder why? Maureen also talks about her father as being a laughing, quick-handed, rogue male who loved looking after women. O'Donnell has red hair like his sons and is an Irishman. He seems to be rather

charismatic since there are always several people around him.

Her mother seems to have been the opposite of her father. She was: gray of hair and face, never joyous, never smiling. The only thing she really was, was devout. She was full of great, limitless, blind, joyless faith.

I think that Maureen must be really pretty with her dark lashes and hair but honestly I have no idea. I also have no idea what she talks about when she says that Irish children living at the docks where she comes from now a lot about sex. What is "...who though more about sex and did less about it..." supposed to mean?!

My last question is if the ending of our text is really the end of the extract because it seems rather abrupt.

#### Additional Notes:

I can only repeat what I have already said. The language is beautiful and eloquent. Like I also said the lack of content bothers me a lot but since one of my friends is reading the book at the moment I'll have her tell me all about it once she is finished. Then she can either recommend it to me or tell me that it is not worth the time. I still don't know if she still loves her father or if she only respects him. I don't think that this aspect of the book is very clear in this one short paragraph. I believe that it is necessary to read more of the book to actually get into the story - of course the whole story cannot be explained in only one chapter.

Well I'll just wait and see if my friend recommends it to me.

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### **TWO KINDS by Amy Tan**

Amazing how intelligent a title can be chosen. With my own texts I always have problems finding the right title that sounds good and the also makes sense and has a meaning. What I like about the title of this short story is the fact that you only get the meaning of it in the last few sentences. I also like the style of the story and the contents is relatively interesting. The story rotates about a girl, Jing-mei, living in America with her parents. Her mother immigrated from China to America after having lost everything, her family, all her belongings and her two twin children. The mother really believes in the American dream – that you can achieve anything if you only try hard enough. The girl isn't as convinced of this theory as her mother so she decides to refuse her mother to turn her into a prodigy. At first her mother wants her to turn into a child movie star and when this won't work she wants her daughter to become a piano prodigy. Even though the family isn't rich at all, her mother even has to work as a cleaning lady, her parents buy the girl, Jing-mei, a second-hand piano. She takes lessons at a retired

piano teacher's house. His name is Mr. Chong and he compares himself to Beethoven since he's just as deaf as the famous composer once was. The fatal thing is that his eyes are too slow to actually follow Jing-mei's fingers when she plays the song so he never notices how wrong it actually sounds, what she's playing. At some time she has to play at a talent show. The girl isn't nervous at all. Somehow she believes that once she starts playing everybody will think she plays well just like her teacher thinks she's really talented. But instead her show turns out disastrous. Jing-mei decides to never play again and I some kind of fit she accuses her mom of not loving her the way she is and reminds her of the babies she once lost – something that is actually considered a taboo in their household. In the end Jing-mei is grown-up and her mother dead. She gets to have her old piano and gets it tuned. It is thirty years after the incident and she decides to try out playing again and finds it quite easy.

I know that the ending of the story has a very significant meaning, but I really can't think of what it could be. I hope we'll talk about it in class so I won't be left outside in the dark.

Something that seems important to me is that her mother once says: "Who asked you be genius? Only ask you be your best. For your sake.". I would really like to know if this sentence really has a deeper meaning to it....

#### **Additional Notes:**

I only want to add a little comment to this entry. We went through the probably most essential words in the whole text. The part about her life being like to pieces of music that belong to the same song. I thought that it was very interesting to hear the interpretation of that passage from other people. I myself didn't notice that "lighter melody" is a sign for relief, but come to think of it that sounds very plausible. It also fits in with the fact that the first part of her life, characterized by "Pleading Child" was shorter but slower. Sometimes in music you have the feeling that a piece which is slow lasts for ages and ages even though it might actually be relatively short. That is probably how she saw her childhood. Something that was hard and seemed to last longer than it actually did. The slowness of the piece also gives it more weight than a quick piece would have.

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### **GIRL IN HYACINTH BLUE - MAGDALENA LOOKING by Susan Vreeland**

The first thing I thought was: did I miss a secret chapter of Girl with a Pearl Earring when I read it some time ago? Personally I think the style of the two novels is so similar it is plain amazing! To me both writers have such a talent in making their words and sentences so soft and flowing and touching when you read them. The language is not complicated but it is neither simple. In choice of words maybe it is. But in the melody and charm of the phrases it is absolutely

beautiful.

I could actually see this girl in front of my inner eye. I could look through her eyes, long with her for her wishes to be fulfilled and feel the overwhelming sadness and disappointment when bit by bit it became clear they never would come true.

The most amazing part to me was the description of her artistic talent, that even though not practiced in reality strived in her mind and feelings. I love the way that Susan Vreeland describes Magdalena running up the steps to the sentry post, the way the girl sees things that I probably would have never seen that way. The river that "seems to borrow its colour from the sky", the "hair that shown flaxen in the sunlight", the leaves on the tree that were lighter where the sun shone through them "except where one leaf crossed over another and so was darker". I admire authors whose language gives you a sense of reading poetry, that makes you feel like you were actually there with the character.

Like I've said before the story is very touching. Magdalena has to help a lot at home since her family is so large but the worst part is that her family knows nothing of her longings and wishes to travel and paint. I have a feeling that, though quite unintentionally, the family neglects and undermines her unusual fantasy and curiosity for life and new, unknown things. Had Magdalena lived a hundred or more years later and had her family been richer she would have been a wonderful student for any teacher. But even worse than her family ignoring her feelings and wishes is how her father seemingly not notices her. It is so frustrated when Magdalena says "Father only smiled queerly when I told him I wanted to paint." She wishes for him to teach her or maybe even only to actually notice her for once. She is so full of happiness when he decides to paint her. It says: she saw his cheeks grow softer, as if he noticed her in his house for the first time". What a horrible feeling that must be! She's 14 or 15 and her father half-notices her for the first time! She loved him and he didn't even properly notice her. It must have eaten up her heart to notice that when he painted her he "looked at her with the same interest he gave to the glass of milk". That's when she starts questioning herself because of his negligence. She says that she's not pretty. She wants him to talk to her but the only thing he does is talk to himself.

I know that it must have been hard having 11 children or so. But I think one of the worst things that can happen to a child is when the child is not noticed or loved. Not because it is overwhelmingly mean or cruel but simply because the parent does not notice the necessity.

She loved her father but she thinks that nobody will ever love her. "Another wish that would never come true, she saw then, even if she lived forever, was that he, that someone, would look at her not as an artistic study, but with love." She loses all belief in love and doesn't even see the possibility of anybody loving her.

Adding on to her grief is that her painting doesn't sell well. The normal customer of her father doesn't even give it a second look. When her father dies she manages to

sell it to the baker in order to relieve their debts.

What shocked me was that she marries a year later. Some saddlemaker of whom she doesn't even mention the name. That man seems to suck the last bit of creativity and liveliness out of her. She says that he was the first man to notice her and that he was a man utterly without imagination, which is absolutely the contrary of the man she would have needed to become happy. To top it all, all the babies she gives birth to die and the only one that survives birth dies a bit later. Her life must have been so horrible and frustrating. I'm amazed that she didn't commit suicide out of disappointment.

In the end she goes to an auction where paintings of her father are being sold alongside with other paintings. She wants to buy the picture of her but of course she doesn't have enough money. It is sold for a bit, not as much as most of the other, but after all... Finally she wants to talk to the people who have bought her picture but instead she decides not to, since her teeth have become bad and she wouldn't know what to say anyways. That's when she noticed her utter unimportance in the world.

With the end of the story i had a picture in front of my eyes. A picture of a dried up plum, that once must have been very juicy and delicious. That's the impression I had of what Magdalena's heart must have looked like in the end. Not that she had turned into a bad person with no heart. More that she still had a heart, a heart that had been deprived of all its former ideas, hopes, wishes, desires, thoughts, plans, belief in love and the world.

#### Additional Notes:

We didn't talk about the extract that much but we did talk a lot about the author and her other piece of literature: *The Passion Of Artemisia*. Susan Vreeland is an author that I think I might really like if I ever read any of her novels. Her style is something that I like a lot. I also liked that content of *The Passion of Artemisia* and that lots of her literature has a connection to real life through art. In *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* and the extract we read the connection is established through the painting that painted *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*. In *The Passion of Artemisia*, Artemisia is the most important female Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. Vreeland's style and the depth of her stories make her a wonderful writer.

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### **DESERT FLOWER - BECOMING A WOMAN by Waris Dirie**

I'm sitting in my room with my eyes wide open in something like shock and my heart is racing. I just read the extract *Becoming a Woman* from the book *Desert Flower* and even though i already knew the story (I saw the film) it so completely

horrified me again that I just don't know what to say.

I don't know which version is worse.

I watched the film with a friend at night some weeks ago and i can remember sitting on the couch together with her and when this scene came on-screen I remember that we were clutching each other and hiding our faces in each other's hair. The worst part wasn't the cutting itself, but the face and behaviour of that sick, horrible, cruel... aaah I could rant on and on about her... woman pulling out the filthy razor blade and sneering all the while. What was maybe even worse was the screaming and sobbing of the girl. I wasn't able to watch anymore but I still had the sound in my ears since stuffing my fingers in my ears barely had any effect. The girl was screaming out her soul. She wasn't crying like somebody who had been heart broken. It sounded like they were slaughtering her, as if she was walking through hell with people slicing her body into pieces. Well they were, in fact.

This is where the main difference is between the film and the book. In the text it says that she didn't scream or cry at all during the circumcision itself. She says that she only started crying when she had to urinate - something i don't even want to think of. Every woman knows that there are normally separate openings for urine and menstrual blood. Imagining that she had to endure urine to collect in the flesh of her wound is just too much to handle.

I don't know where to continue! There are thousands of things that i want to put down on paper before the race on. But i don't know where to start.

My first thought was: What do men nowadays think about this text? The only thing i can do right now is scrunch up my face even though it's not really happening to me but I'm only thinking about it. I want to roll up in a ball and cramp my hands around my legs and stomach in order to shield off the sensitive area. To protect it. How helpless these girls must feel! Lying there on some disgusting and dirty rock with their own MOTHER pinning their legs apart and such a horrible woman working to cut off the most sensitive parts of a girl.

I mean how can a woman actually do that?!?!? She has to know what pain it causes! That she is still able to perform the cruel act on other little!! girls is not normal. I think you have to have some mental defect to be able to do that. To me it is just so unbelievable that once you've experienced something like that you can inflict the pain on another girl. Probably it is so deeply rooted in their tradition that they don't see a way out. I couldn't think of any other reason why a mother would otherwise do such a thing!

I don't think that boys can even imagine what pain that would cause - just like they can't imagine how painful a birth can be.

Another thing that just makes me want to scream is that in Somalia it is such an important and necessary tradition that the girls are actually looking forward to

becoming a woman. If it had happen to me - I know I can't really make a comparison since I live in a relatively civilized and emancipated world - I would be screaming it at the world. Warning every girl that crossed my path and loathing all men in the world who still believe that girls are born "dirty".

What a typical step of men to come up with something as idiotic as saying that healthy young girls with their genitals intact are UNHEALTHY. And they make up this shit (please excuse my language but I just can't think of any other word to express my hatred against these people) only to ensure that the girl is still a virgin when they marry her. Has anybody ever asked the men if they are virgins when they marry?!?? That would solve the problem. If both the man and the woman have to be virgin at marriage nobody would ever have come up with such a horrendously stupid idea as cutting girls up and sewing up their genitals! But of course in such a male dominated world as we live in men have the priviledge to do whatever they please while women have to follow ridiculous rules in order to be "worth" something. complete BULLSHIT if you ask me. its time to tell these people that they have no right to see women as something inferior, that they would have serious problems if women weren't there to take care of their nice tribal families, the food, the children, the housing, the laundry.

But I am running ahead of myself. I can't leave out that Somalia is a country still rattled by civil war and in my eyes one of the best examples for the primitive side of Africa.

I just think its plain horrendous that the mother just play blind and deaf infront of their daughters and bring them to the slaughterhouse themselves. But we can't think that this is just a problem down in Africa. There has been enough on the news about families that have immigrated to Europe or America and when the time is "right", which it actually never is, they take the girls back to Africa and have them circumcised. Sometime they even pay the horrible "surgeon" to come to the country they live in.

I think the whole world should fight more against this crime, since, as Waris Dirie says in her book, some girls even die during or after the curcumcision.I think that the women there don't even know that in other countries it is not tradition to mutilate girls. And by thinking that their agony and suffering is the same all over the world, they feel that the burden is less heavy. I think that it would be important to raise the awareness around the globe that circumcission is not necessary and that women who have not been circumcised are by no means dirty or disgusting. Maybe some women in those countries might then fight agains the intervention. But I think this is unlikely. In a world that is so dominated by men, as ir is the case in Somalia, it is practically impossible to change the attitude of women for or against something. Because in these countries women are so dependant on their husbands, fathers, even brothers, that it would be enough for these male people to simply refuse the woman the right to leave the house to keep them from learning about the inequalities they live in.

Sad sad story. To us in the wealthy countries it almost sounds like a horror movie,

but we have to wake up and finally realize that it is indeed a horror movie, but one that actually happens - every day! In just like in horror movies the victims are the most innocent and helpless creatures. Only that in their case there's no good end to the movie. To be honest there's no end to the movie at all!!!

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### **THE MUSCLE MYSTIQUE by Barbara Kingsolver**

A short entry to a short but amazingly funny story. Today my 5 minutes seem so much shorter than usually (probably the pre-matura stress).

Sometimes you have to just love a story, not because the content is so overwhelming or impressive but because the authors style just captures you. The Muscle Mystique is probably the funniest short story that I've read so far in this course and the way the author expresses things is so natural. She just says things the way I would say or think them too. No overboarding jokes but sentences expressed in such a curious way that you just have to laugh.

The introduction is already great. She says that her baby-sitter must have thought that she is having an affair, coming home all flushed, heart pounding and freshly showered. I would have thought exactly the same thing. But that far the story isn't anything special yet. Then the author plants in her first joke which took me by surprise and had me laughing for a few minutes. I'm a person who images things in the figuratively (like J.D. from Scrubs =)) and when she mentioned guys stalking around the weight room like parrie chicken I could really see them bobbing their heads in the typical chicken-way. Another funny thing was imagining the main person getting hit by a sneaker during gym or comparing the florist opening her garden gate with the Berlin Wall falling.

The best part however is the fact that she is unable to open pickle jars and the thing with the vanity plate saying OPN JRS (Open Jars) which would be the achievement that she would most likely boast with =).

The main theme of the story is that the main character always feels weak and that she constantly felt mortified during school because she was so skinny and fragile.

I think that what she says about the standards of beauty always reflecting the fact that one doesn't have to work a lot to earn money is so very true. The beauty standard is always what is hard to get for the majority of the people. Not enough food - you should be fat to show how rich you are. Too much food - prove that you can control yourself and that food is not something you have to care much about (=be skinny), work on a farm to earn your living - be as white as possible, work all day in at an airconditioned desk that you hate wishing you could go out into the sun - get a tan... pathetic and really annoying but everybody follows the "rules" anyways.

The only facts that you get to know about the woman is that she has a daughter,

that she is a writer, that she doesn't way alot and that she has always wanted to be strong.

#### Additional Notes:

There's really not a lot that I want to add to the entry I wrote some time ago. We talked through a few things in class that seemed to underline what I was thinking. I was amazed to see though that not everyone liked the extract as much as I did. I think that a few people thought that there was a lack in contents or that the story was just boring. Maybe what I said before is true that the author's sense of humor is very similar to mine baccuse not all people in class thought that the jokes were as funny as I thought they were. It was also mentioned that Barbara Kingsolver wrote a lot about immigration in the south of America and I really wonder if she will write about the attempted assassination of the female politiction from Arizon since that seems to fit well with her book *The Bean Trees* that she wrote in 1988 and that also deals with the complicated immigration and social intergation in the south of North America.

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### **Marrying Absurd by Joan Didion**

Even though it says in the first paragraph that Jaon Didion is known for her ironic nonfiction work I don't really know what to think about her. Normally I really enjoy irony but in this extract I couldn't find one funny thing. For me irony always has to be something funny to be entertaining. I think that the problem was that I didn't get half of what she is writing about. I know that lots of people spontaneously get married in Las Vegas and that marrying seems like a business there but the problem was that I just could find the meaning that Joan Didion wants to transmit with "Marrying Absurd". Is she critizing the text? Is she saying that it isn't so bad after all to get married in Las Vegas? And what does she want to tell us with the extract that she gives about her experience of a wedding party? She says that the bride was really young and additionally that she was highly pregnant during her wedding I simply don't get if she's trying to make people rethink about getting married in Vegas or not... Is she trying to convay something to her readers at all?

#### Additional Notes:

Since I couldn't think of much to write about Marrying Absurd before our lesson today I'll just focus more on the additional info than usual. I think that if you like this story depends on how you perceive it. I wouldn't have thought that anyone likes it, but it looks like there are quite a few people who got Joan Didion's stinging irony and thought that it was funny. I still can't get much out of the story and I think that the story has left a rather negative impact on me. I wouldn't want to read anything else from Joan Didion. In addition what I heard about her book today was horrible. I cannot identify myself with characters like Kathrin described them in Didion's book. If I see or read about people who are as passive

and weak as the woman in Pay it As It Lays I get so aggressive that I tend to try and yell at these people. I think that would give quite a funny scene to see me yelling into a book trying t... (Moodle Journal doesn't accept more text! 9000 words max.)