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The Worst Paradox In countless ways, experiencing trauma is a no-win situation; it is difficult if not impossible to benefit from such an experience. But how does trauma affect the current state of the victim? More importantly, how can we sympathize with victims of incomprehensible trauma? Leila Aimed, Beth Loafed, and Martha Stout with their respective works, *On Becoming an Arab*, *Selections from Losing Matthew Sheppard*, and *When I Woke Up Tuesday Morning it was Friday* discuss the use of distancing in response to trauma in one's past.

Remarkably, human beings have developed the ability to distance themselves, or in some cases to dissociate, from the ordeal at the cost of loss of memory or even identity. There are times when this can be so extensive that hours, days or even years of one's life can completely vanish along with the emotions and physical stimulations that compliment these memories. The absence of such emotions could potentially jeopardize the completeness of one's identity along with the ability to create new memories and lasting relationships with others.

Leila Aimed, in her essay *On Becoming an Arab*, is forced to reflect on manifold histories to cope with the loss of her Egyptian community; her identifications of harsh realities reflect anger towards those who made her 'become an Arab'. As she journeys through history to resolve the loss, Aimed distances herself to cope with the anger associated with her loss of community and ultimately deconstructs then reconstructs her identity. Likewise, Beth Loafed also references individuals in her essay who have also experienced loss and distance themselves from it.

Beth Loafer's essay, *Selections from Losing Matthew Sheppard*, deals with the brutal murder of Matthew Sheppard, a homosexual teenager from Laramie, Wyoming. Loafer recapitulates the responses and reactions of those in and out of Laramie. But more in depth, Loafer wonders if people nationwide paid more attention to Matthews murder than to other equally vicious murders because Matthews entertaining image was constantly used by the media as a symbol of hate.

Loafer also delves into the ways in which her subjects, especially Seth, lose the ability to connect their body/mind to those of others. Martha Cutout's essay, *When I woke up Tuesday Morning it was Friday*, explicitly describes the ways in which extreme distancing, or dissociation, can cause a traumatized person to believe that they see the meaning of their lives as something they need to construct as opposed to accepting its linearity. Stout highlights the intense sense of loss and the lack of continuous threads of memory that link one to another.

She explains how, under these circumstances, people lose the ability to command their own lives and develop healthy memories and relationships with others. While Aimer and Loafer discuss more social and cultural instances of distancing, Stout offers a clinical approach to deal with extreme circumstances. Distancing, although initially a life-preserving defense mechanism, develops into a self-destructive way of life and causes a person to lose the ability to accurately perceive the present due to missing/distorted memories in one's past, therefore articulating the true pains associated with trauma and loss.

The media has the tendency to create false memories, which eventually distorts people's past memories and molds their abilities to develop healthy perceptions of the present. Laramie had never witnessed such a brutal murder before and the locals along with others nationwide did not know how to respond to the occurrence of such an unspeakable act. They had always seen Laramie as a good place where residents do not kill their neighbors. Eventually, the crime and its motives had spread to affect not only those directly involved.

Loafed writes about how there was so much pack Journalism after the murder; the media consequently gave Laramie the reputation off bag killing redneck's town. Believing and acting upon such misleading news stories promoted a disengagement from the world in the sense that many were oblivious to the media's distortion of the story. They also had to distance themselves from Laramie in order o " The place of gay men and lesbians in American culture med to be debated in every way possible" due to the media's alteration of the truth (Loafed 384).

The media's overcharge and pack Journalism even made homosexuality, by itself, an identity thus isolating homosexuals and lesbians from mainstream culture. Such ostracism highlights the true pains associated with loss. In order for Loafed to write about such an experience, she must distance herself from the environment. " We didn't simply live here anymore: we were something transmitted, watched, evaluated... ' suspect a few people naturally sought that televised attention... Mostly though, it just poised people off' (Loafed 378).

By watching their every moves and actions on television, those in Laramie also experienced a detachment from reality; they acted upon how they were perceived on television as opposed to what they believed to be righteous and appropriate. It even escalated to the point where it was unclear whether those in Laramie attended Matthews vigils (and those for other hate crime victims) to mourn his death or to make sure mourning was observed by others. Without room to breathe, those in Laramie could not maintain their own identities and act as themselves due to lingering fear of being judged for not properly observing Matthews death. Similarly,

Leila Aimed discusses the ways in which the media distorted past memories through propaganda: “ I am sure I sensed these insidious, subterranean shifts and rearrangements of our feelings that this new bludgeoning propaganda was effecting, or trying to effect, in us. And I am sure that this, as well as the sheer hatefulness of being endlessly subjected to propaganda, was part of the reason I so much disliked and resisted the idea that I was an Arab” (Aimed 28). Although the government was repressing Egyptians and encouraging conformity via media, Aimed attempted resistance to such conformity even when it was shoved in her face.

Mead’s memories and feelings remained opaque until she voyaged through the history of the world and her childhood. By piecing together this fragmented information, some of which being shocking and surprising, Aimed better understood her present identity which was obviously obscure and hazy. Analogous to the ways in which Loafed and those in Laramie distanced themselves, Aimed had to separate herself from her past in order to recapitulate it; she had to put herself in the perspective of an outsider –

one with no knowledge or sentimental attachment towards Egyptian or Arab culture in order to articulate it in an essay.

Subsequently, it can be argued that the murder of Matthew Sheppard provided the spark that gave birth to such heated debate and controversy over gay rights and hate mongering, but the media's irresponsibility regarding the story provided the fuel that kept the fire burning in the hearts of those nationwide. The media treated Matthew as an impersonal object of study as opposed to a dearly departed human being; he was euthanized from a once flourishing young man into a photogenic symbol for the purpose of argument and shock.

Dissociation “ can develop into a way of life that leads to emotional attachment and prolonged disengagement with the world”, and as a result of the media's misrepresentation of the past, many people both in and out of Laramie became disengaged from the world (Stout 654). This disengagement blurred the consciousness of those in and out of Laramie. The question as to whether people attended vigils because they wanted to mourn Matthews death or because they wanted to be observed for mourning Matthews death was always lingering above the heads of Laramie residents. But the crime, and Laramie, had already begun to take on a second life, a broadcast existence barely tethered to the truths of that night of his place, an existence nourished less by facts and far more by the hyperbole's of tabloid emotion” showing how the murder and the media gave birth to a misleading story (Loafed 375). The general public acted passionately and emotionally upon stretched truths, rumors, and sometimes even complete fallacies. By appealing to the compassion and pity of the general public, the

media therefore demonstrated how much weight past memories truly hold upon the present perception of reality.

In doing so, the public became vulnerable to outrage in response to Matthews picture. Likewise, the way in which the media distorted the past regarding the murder of Matthew Sheppard is analogous to the way in which the Arab propaganda stimulated assimilation upon the Egyptians. “ The propaganda worked on me and on others. To question our Arabians and all that our Arabians implied became unthinkable. Only despicable, unprincipled traitors would do such a thing.

And it is with this complicated legacy that my own sense of identity as Egyptian and as Arab is entangled” showing the vast social entanglements that Aimee must conceptualized her findings with (Aimee 28). This misleading action taken by the media manipulates the emotions of the public causing them to not act as themselves, thus compromising their identities which thereby articulates the true pain that accompanies trauma and loss. In many ways, dissociation involves a numbing effect that can divert attention away from an experienced trauma and towards a much larger or different issue.

Leila Aimee diverts her attention too different issue to numb the pain that accompanied her loss of community and identity. Aimee is not a racist but she detests the term ‘ Arab’ because it alludes to a people of lesser unanimity. Aimee shies away from reflecting upon painful truths regarding herself and her culture by writing “ There was no question I couldn’t do it. I’d just have to leave it out. Just forget it – Arab, not Arab – Just forget it” (Aimee

31). She eventually forces herself to endure the painful reflections by questioning the actions of her people, her parent's, and her own self.

To do this, Aimer must distance herself in order to make these self-reflections; she must look at herself from an outsider's perspective and metaphorically 'leave her body. Similarly, at the end of Cutout's essay, Julia says to Dry. Stout "In fact, it's going to kill me one day. And even if it doesn't kill me, what's the use of living if I can't feel anything? Why should I be alive when I lose big parts of my life? How can you care about anything if you can't even know the truth about yourself, if you keep losing yourself" and Julia eventually decides to try hypnosis to confront the abuse head on (Stout 674).

This is analogous to the way Aimer resists disengagement by making the conscious decision to voyage through history to resolve the loss. Stout concludes her essay with Cilia's decision to try hypnosis but is not specific as to whether or not it worked. Aimer, on the other hand, admits to still feeling a strong sense of loss. At the end of her essay, Aimer writes: Anger, as Maser's own choice of words makes clear, was the key emotion in the early formation of his nascent identity as an Arab... Spring is here. The crocuses are out on the Backs.

Rivulets of blue, all along the pathways, adest, adest blue, and gashes and splashes of it on the verges and under the trees. Why then, walking through this, did I suddenly feel this sense of loss – measureless, measureless loss – sweep through me (Aimer 45). The harsh reality of the matter is that the lush spring greenery reminded Aimer of her loss. Spring

usually reminds us of rebirth and new beginnings as it does for Aimee. These new beginnings are usually positive, but Aimee thinks of the day she ‘ became an Arab’ and was reborn into a new culture that she opposed and hated in her youth.

Imagine being reminded of something that makes your blood boil when faced with something that makes others feel renewal, rebirth, rejuvenation and purity. Such a burden epitomizes the trauma associated with loss because distancing, in this case, promoted isolation and oppression for the victim of loss. Those without the burden of loss, on the other hand, can enjoy clean slates and rejuvenation with spring time. For Aimee, whether distancing was embraced or resisted, her loss still haunted her thus making sense of Cutout’s no-win situation analogy.

Likewise, Martha Stout also sheds light on how his devastating trauma can truly be. Stout describes how these victims see their lives as something they must perpetually work to piece together due to a deficit or fragmentation of past memories. As stated earlier, Julia decided that her life was not worth living if she kept losing herself. Julia undergoes an extreme identity crisis because the trauma-induced diversification prevents her from being able to use past memories to feel emotion or to retain memories. With such debilitating effects, it is difficult if not impossible to construct one’s identity.

Another of Cutout’s subjects, Seth, provides similar insight: “[His] description of his inner life makes it wrenchingly clear that the traumatized person is unable to feel completely connected to another person, even a friend, even a spouse. Just as limiting, perhaps even more limiting is such a person’s

disconnection from his or her own body' (Stout 672). Seth could not remember a unique detail pertaining to the birth of his children. The acknowledgement of the occurrence along with the sheer Joy that accompanies such an event should be an integral part of Stet's fatherhood, but it simply isn't there; he wasn't there to witness it.

Seth also admits to 'not being there' when he and his wife make love. The inability to feel a bond as beautiful as that between a husband and wife epitomizes how distance via numbing distorts past memories. Such distortion denies Seth something as crucial as his identity as a father figure to his children and husband figure to his wife. When the psyche is faced with too much to handle, the mind can distance itself from these traumatic incidents in the form of partial or complete disruptions of normal integration of a person's conscious or psychological functioning.

Cutout's clinical perception is an extreme, yet Aimed and Loafed experienced and discussed more common forms of distancing. Although dissociation can be very damaging to the psyche and the emotional well-being a person in the long term, dissociation is a remarkable feat performed by the human mind under extreme conditions. The elements of dissociation usually come in the form of diversification, psychological numbing, and disengagement.

Beth Loafed with Selections from Losing Matthew Sheppard, Leila Aimed with On Becoming an Arab, and Martha Stout with When I woke up Tuesday Morning it was Friday all explore the ways in which distancing can start as a defense mechanism, but can eventually prove to be a destructive way of life.

The ways in which these authors articulate the feelings of the individuals who have suffered in each of the essays epitomize the true pain that compliments trauma. We can use these valuable articulations as a meaner to feel sympathy for aroma victims who feel as though no one understands their pain.

Perhaps we cannot fully comprehend the pain until we have actually lived through such an ordeal, but sympathy is one of the most beautiful and intimate emotions two humans can share together. The ability to feel sympathy for those who feel isolated, misunderstood, or reluctant to trust due to their suffering is precious and can conceivably make all the difference. Human beings, in many ways, achieve a higher tier of humanity as they show this sort of selflessness and compassion towards others who have been burdened with this sort of disturbance or loss.