

The Meconium Manifesto

an excerpt

What I did not know is that to give birth you need to shit. I had forgotten how to shit on all fours. And now I have to remember it on a high table in a small room with a very bright, white lamp illuminating my brown asshole and a group of people, mostly strangers, cheering me on.

From behind the blinding, dispassionate light, blasts the countdown, followed by a command, repeated over and over again: “Three, two, one! Push into your ass!”

The eagle-winged lioness with the human head sits on a road paved with bones and excrement. She is the gatekeeper. In the Greek myth, the Sphinx asked Oedipus Rex a riddle:

“What goes on four legs in the morning, two feet at noon, and three legs in the evening?”

His answer is “a human” — how we move from crawling like a baby to walking upright as adults, to walking with a cane in old age. Those that don’t guess the answer to the riddle are devoured by the Sphinx. On all fours on a road of bones, staring up at the unblinking eyes of the Sphinx, I realize then and there it is the wrong riddle. The riddle is: “What lives through forgetting that it is born between piss and shit?” Answer: the human — born between the urethra and the anus.

We become ‘human’ — that is, we enter culture, language, philosophy — through forgetting we are animals. That’s my answer.

I say 'forgotten' because animals have no problems shitting in front of others. Babies also have no issues, and it is the task of mothers to teach them how to discipline and repress their anal cavity. I am reminded of this, inevitably, each time during bathtime, where during the most serene moment of having an iridescent soap bubble suspended on one's plump little hand, pieces of poo come out, floating and fluffing in the foamy bathtub. I scoop them out with the plastic soup ladle and pour them into the toilet. Perched on the white tiles between the bathtub and the toilet, I am doing the work of civilization by separating the clean from the unclean.

So I have to remember how to get out of my head, how to be a baby, to be close to the ground, to be an animal. To forget not just metaphor, but the very existence of meaning and to let go of language to the point that it growls and drools. Towards the end, I throw up. It is a waterfall of undigested Chinese wood ear mushrooms. They erupt from me whole, each a slimy brown star. By the time I surrender enough to shit, there is no more "I." There is just this flesh. A flesh that is straining, expanding, rupturing, opening and closing. And the Sphinx is laughing.

They say we are made of stars. To give birth, you have to remember that you are made of shit.

You must become kaka.

Darja Filippova

Manuscript available upon request.