



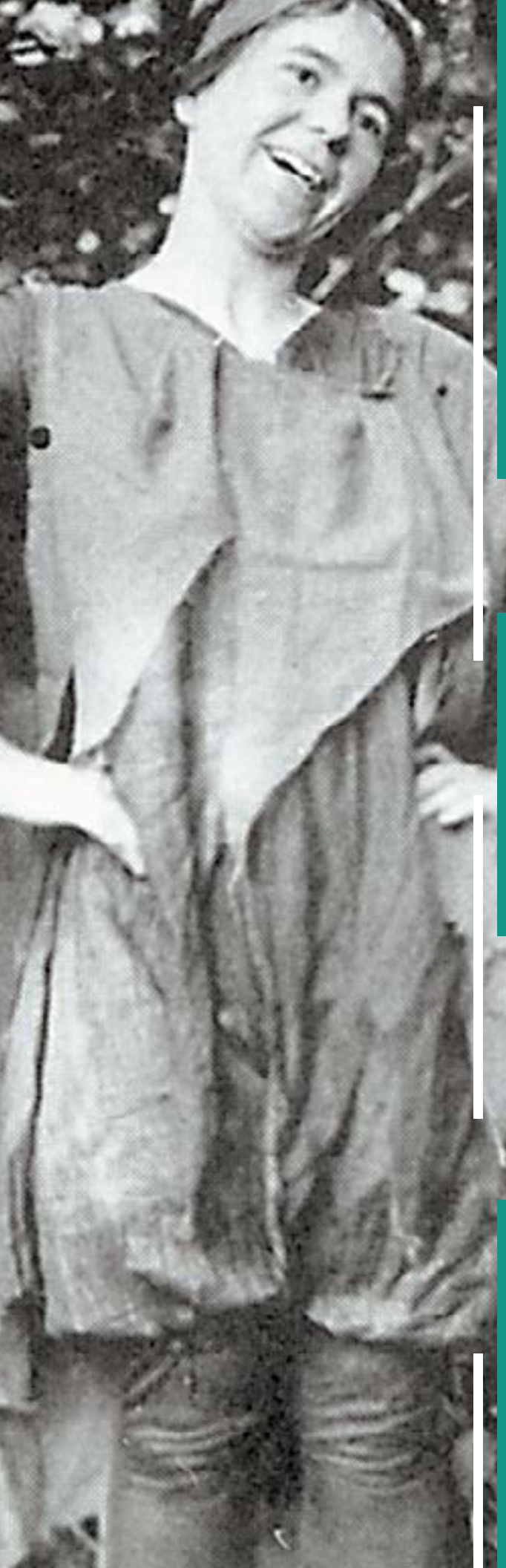
LAKE ERIE
COLLEGE

DAWN POWELL PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING



KATE CARTER AWARDS

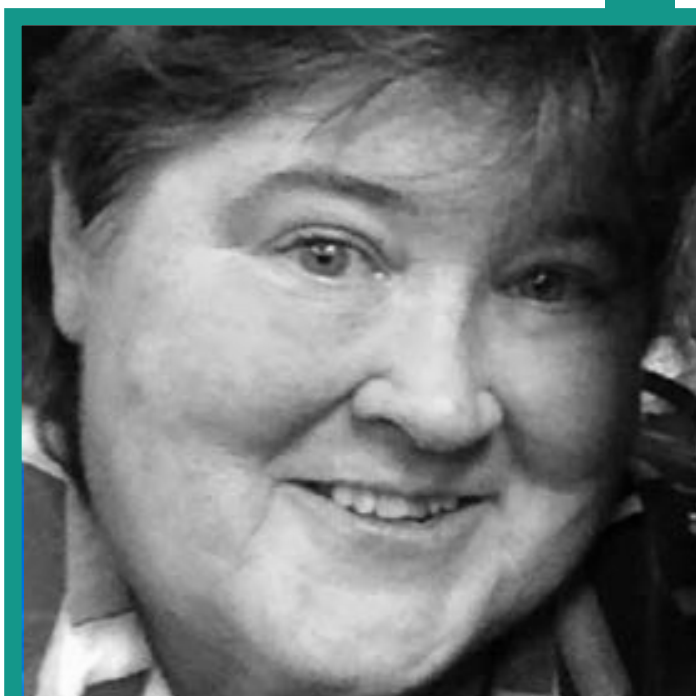
FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE CORE WRITING



DAWN POWELL PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING

About Dawn Powell

The award's namesake, author Dawn Powell, attended Lake Erie College from 1914 - 1918 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. During her time at LEC, Powell edited and wrote for the College's literary publication and was active in theater. By the time of her death in 1965, she had written 16 novels, nine plays and numerous short stories.



KATE CARTER AWARDS

FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE CORE WRITING

Named for Professor Kate Carter, who was a creative writer, a poet, an artist and a much loved and long serving adjunct professor in the Lake Erie College Department of English, these awards honor Professor Carter's legacy of academic rigor, student engagement, thoughtful mentoring and commitment to excellent writing.

About Kate Carter:

Kate Carter was an award-winning poet and recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Fellowship in Poetry. She received her MA in Creative Writing from Antioch University McGregor and taught in the Psychology department at Antioch University New England and the English and Women's Studies departments at New Mexico State University. She is the author of two chapbooks of poetry, *Covenant* and *Lodestar: Night Sky*.



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DAWN POWELL AWARDS

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, ALUMNI

LAUREN NEHODA

“BURN FROM THE GROUND UP”

Ambrosia woke up to the sound of screaming and the smell of smoke. The yelling, while irritating, wasn't all that unusual for her loud and chaotic house. The smoke was new, though. And concerning. Ambrosia quickly rose from her bed and ran from her room, tripping over her feet as adrenaline began to flow through her veins. Outside in the hallway was pandemonium, employees were running haphazardly and screaming in terror, trying to exit the large home without getting trampled. Although calling where Ambrosia lived a “home” would be a major understatement. With its many staircases, endless rooms and hallways, and full of people doing any number of things at all times of day and night, it was more like a bustling business than a comfortable place to feel safe and at ease.

Ambrosia Christiano was the daughter of Amadeo Christiano, head of the Christiano family, the most influential power on The Island, an unoriginally named plot of land off the coast of New York. Their house was a mansion right in the center of island, recognizable by the high castle-like walls and twenty four seven security personnel seen prowling around the property. The house was a dark color, made of black and brown brick, with lots of windows but seemingly no light, giving off a dark imposing aura to anyone who passed it. That dark aura emanating from outside was an extension from what came from inside, but that night felt different. Darker, heavier, more menacing than normal, an unusual, foreboding feeling that left Ambrosia with a pit in her stomach that said everything was changing.

Daring to breach the safety of her doorway, she immediately took a right to go deeper into the house, fighting against the current of everyone else trying to get out. She could distantly hear sirens in the background getting closer, signaling she didn't have a lot of time before firefighters arrived. She couldn't tell where the fire was coming from, or how bad it was, but the smoke was thick and heavy on the highest floor where her room was. She put her cloth t-shirt used for her pajamas over her mouth as she crouched low, trying not to suffocate as she ran to her destination. Her father's office was in the highest and farthest part of the manor, which made logistical sense, but was now becoming a massive inconvenience as she finally reached it, coughing and out of breath, anxiety making it harder to pull air into her lungs. In the doorway she leaned over on her knees and breathed deeply, trying to catch her breath, broken by coughs from the smoke. The door was already open, and her bodyguard and closest friend, Elda, turned to look up at her, already farther inside the room.

Elda's tall frame was crouched over something, knee bent over one side, foot flat on the other, hidden beneath her height. As Ambrosia got closer she could see it was a body. Elda looked up at her, dark eyes piercing, partly covered by her long black hair, her pale skin the only thing differentiating her from a shadow. She had blood on her hands and her shirt, the blood making her all black uniform even darker and more intimidating. Her face was emotionless, eyes giving nothing away as she stood up, her towering frame looming over Ambrosia's small one. Her heart beat even faster as Elda stopped right in front of her, she could feel it pulsating inside her chest and pounding in her ears, as all other sounds faded as she stared. Immediately, Ambrosia knew. That foreboding pit in her stomach acknowledged her then, told her that she was right. That everything changed.

"He's dead." Elda said, plucking the words right from her brain.

Dead. He was dead. Her dad was dead. Actually dead. Gone. Never coming back. Ambrosia didn't know how she should have felt. She wasn't surprised, she knew it was coming, it was inevitable with what he did. But knowing it was different than actually seeing it. Secretly wanting it was different than it being real. The empty, lifeless eyes so similar and yet so different from the cold indifference she'd been greeted with her entire life. She knew she was loved, but she wasn't cared for. Her father resented that she was a female, that he couldn't pass down his company, his beloved family business to her, believing she couldn't handle it, that she wasn't prepared for it. The business he dealt in was evil, dirty, and in his mind not cut out for women, or rather women weren't cut out for his business. One of the consequences of his work, though, was that it led to his family being in danger. His wife, Ambrosia's mom, was killed while Ambrosia was young, as an act of revenge against Amadeo for the wrongs he committed.

Elda was presented to Ambrosia shortly after that incident, trained from a young age to be an emotionless killer, a protector, a dog to obey Ambrosia's every command. She hated Elda at first, hated that her father hadn't checked on her since her mom's death, that he couldn't be bothered to be a parent, that all he did was shove this new stranger on her and call it a day. Ambrosia took advantage of Elda at first, ordered her to do strange, unusual, embarrassing, down right cruel things. It was only when she ordered Elda to cut off her pinky and saw her grab the knife, about to cut, that Ambrosia realized Elda's loyalty and how grateful she really was for it. From then on things were different. Ambrosia taught Elda to read and write, and Elda taught Ambrosia basic self defense if anything were to happen while she wasn't around, and a true bond was formed. Ever the guard dog, a name that didn't bother Elda in the slightest, she was always behind Ambrosia, protecting her, looking out for her, supporting her.

"I'm sorry." Elda said, bringing Ambrosia back to reality, out of the trance she found herself in.

"Why?" Ambrosia asked.

"You're crying." She said shortly.

Ambrosia numbly brought her hand to face, shocked to feel wetness on her cheeks. Her father was a brutal man, running his business on violence and fear under the illusion of loyalty. The only real loyalty was between him and his bank account, and his employees' true loyalty was to staying alive and to not be on the receiving end of his anger. His power and presence was found in every part of their island through corruption, blackmail, and greed. She shouldn't feel sad, shouldn't mourn him, mourn who he was. But maybe what she was actually mourning was what he could've been, the father he should've been, the life she would've had. It was then Ambrosia collapsed, the sobs breaking free from her lungs in large, painful heaves, broken apart by harsh coughing from the smoke inhalation catching up to her. Elda gathered her in her arms as she cried and cried, body trembling and unable to stop.

That was how the firefighters found them, Elda holding a broken Ambrosia over her dead father, while her childhood home burnt from the bottom up. The firefighters moved quickly and got the two girls out just before the house collapsed from the structural damage, the fire having gotten worse the longer it went on. Elda and

Ambrosia were fixed with oxygen masks to counteract the damage from the smoke inhalation they suffered, shock blankets were put around their shoulders. Ambrosia had stopped crying, stopped feeling, by the time the fire chief told her that it was a total loss, that the fire started in the kitchen from a towel too close to an open flame, where it quickly escalated and spread. Ambrosia took in the news with a straight face, too overwhelmed to feel anything, only speaking when she confirmed she had a place to stay. Being eighteen, the two girls wouldn't be taken by child services, most hotels wouldn't let them get a room, and being from such a private family left Ambrosia with no friends. But what her father didn't know was that Ambrosia secretly applied and got accepted into a college on the main land, in New York. Using the money from her family she rented an apartment for her and Elda to stay in when school started in a few months time, but the apartment had been ready for weeks.

With just the clothes on their backs, the two girls left the only home they'd ever known, and never looked back. Later that week, the fire chief called and told her that her father had been about to go to a secret meeting with his inner circle when the fire broke out, throwing off his plans, and that everyone in the inner circle died from the fire, the floor collapsing on them. Since her father never trusted Ambrosia with anything to do with his business, when he died, it did too. But all of his money went to her, so she was able to give back to his employees, giving all of the ones that thankfully survived enough to get started with a new life. Her father's funeral was held two weeks after the fire when his body was released by the medical examiner. It was determined that he was stabbed and the fire was set as a distraction for the killer to escape, which they succeeded, the case quickly going cold with no new leads. The only people to show up to the funeral were Ambrosia and Elda, who stayed just long enough for them to lower his casket into the ground, before they went back to the mainland and their new life.

"Ambrosia?" Once again, Elda's voice brought her back to the present day.

"Yes?" She asked.

"Where'd you go?" Elda asked simply.

"Today is seven years from when my father died. For some reason it's affecting me more than it usually does."

Ambrosia reflected, conflicted by her simultaneous sadness and relief.

"That's because you've finally achieved what he never could." Elda says bluntly.

It was true, Ambrosia was now exactly where she wanted to be. Even though her father's business died with him, nothing ever truly stayed dead. With ambition and a carefully thought out plan, her and Elda moved back to The Island and built her father's business from the ground up. She made new deals with his old allies, operated on real trust and respect, and with the reputation Elda had as the Boss's Guarddog, no one dared to resist her power. On top of the ashes of her old house, her old life, she rebuilt a newer, bigger and better house. It was lighter with more windows and more light, the darkness no longer emanating from inside, just a feeling of warmth. Most of her father's employees were willing to come back and work for her, being fairly compensated for once. In addition to taking over from where her father left off, Ambrosia created her own legacy. She hired new specialists, opened multiple businesses, donated to charity, and became the island's sweetheart. She was a positive figure in the community, and a powerful one underneath it, in the back alleyways her father once controlled. Both sides of her were thriving, doing better than her father ever did, and she couldn't be any happier.

“You’re right, Elda. Everything is exactly as it should be.” Ambrosia finally agreed after a moment of silence.

“Do you ever regret it?” Elda asked curious.

“No. I did what needed to be done.” She answered simply. “Although we got lucky that the fire took out father’s crew. It gave you a lot less work to do. Did I ever thank you for what you did?”

“There was no need. I do whatever I am ordered to do.” Elda said, and the matter was dropped forever.



DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, ALUMNI

MIA STARNONI

“REVOLUTION BY NIGHT”

Nickie hated Ohio with a burning passion.

She figured that out the moment she was dropped off at her Grandparents' farm earlier that month. Her parents insisted that her and her brother needed some fresh air or whatever the excuse was. She was ninety-nine percent sure it was complete bullshit. They were probably out sailing or at some nice resort down south while she was trapped on a farm miles away from anything and stuck looking at grass all day long. It was that or they had gotten sick of her moping around their apartment back home all the time.

It was probably both.

So, her parents sent them both packing to Ohio for the spring. Yay....

God, it was torture. Pure torture. It was too quiet, too boring, had too much fucking corn. It had too many rules too; no swearing, no loud music, no TV, no exploring the woods, no going outside after dark. Even weird, completely random rules like shutting all the windows before five o'clock and leaving meat scraps out for coyotes. Nickie found it to be all too much and severely anti-teenager. She wondered how her aunt and cousins survived living there year round. It was ridiculous that anyone could live someplace with literally nothing to do. She missed New York and the city; all the noise and intensity. Hell, she missed the people. New York was full of assholes, sure, but at least she was around other people besides her family. Out in the country, she had nothing and no one. No distractions from life or from her own mind.

She was going to go crazy.

Nickie sat in the front room, staring out the window into the pitch black nothingness outside. She craved escape.

“Hey, Nicole,” Nickie turned slightly to see Jeffery, her Grandparent's farmhand who lived on the property as well, “Have you seen Carrie?”

“No...” she turned back to the window, continuing her gazing.

“Damn kid,” he muttered, “I told her I needed her to finish up in the kitchen. Your Grandma and Grandpa can't do everything around here.”

“Mhm,” Nickie let out, but she wasn't really listening.

“I mean she has to take some responsibility soon, like you. You do your best to help out even though you're on vacation. She could learn a thing or two from you.”

“Yeah.”

Jeffery was quiet for a moment, letting a brief silence stretch out.

“What’s eatin’ ya, kid?” He asked softly,

“What do you mean?” Nickie asked.

“Don’t give me that. I can tell when a teenage girl is upset, with Carrie and all. Why you out of bed?”

She shrugged, “It’s too hot up there.”

He hummed thoughtfully in response, “Yeah. These old houses heat up in the summer.” He slapped his hand against the door frame for emphasis.

Nickie said nothing. She silently hoped Jeffery would go away and leave her to wallow in her own self-pity. Of course, he didn’t.

“Carrie said you didn’t talk all day. She was kinda worried.”

Nickie quickly turned to look at him, “She was worried about me?”

Jeffery laughed, “Yeah, a little bit. She won’t admit it ever but, well, you know my daughter. Stubborn till the end.”

Nickie shrugged, “I guess.”

“So, what is bothering you?”

Nickie let out a puff of air. She assumed he wasn’t going to leave until she spilled.

“I’m just...not happy.”

“Well, why?”

Nickie let out a pitiful laugh, “I have no idea. I’ve been unhappy for so long and I don’t know how to fix it. I wish I did. I...just as fed up with everything. I hate it.”

Another moment of silence. Jeffery knelt down next to her, his face solemn, “I’m sorry, kid. I know what it feels like to be unhappy like that.”

Nickie picked her head up, “You do?”

“Yup. Happened after my wife died. But, it gets better with time. Ain’t there anything that makes you happy? Even something small?”

“Carrie.” She spoke quicker than she could think. She clamped her mouth shut, face going beet red as Jeffery laughed.

“Well hey! That’s good! We have that in common, then. Having friends when you feel down is important.” Nickie let out a breath, “Oh! R-right. Friends. That’s right. Heh heh...”

God, she felt stupid.

“Well,” Jeffery stood up, “Um sure you’ll be feeling better soon, kid. Life out in the country is good for the soul. How about you take a lap around the house to clear your head, huh? Fresh air helps the spirits, you know.”

Nickie blinked, “Isn’t...that against the rules? You know, with the bears and coyotes and stuff?”

That was the first rule her grandparents had told her and her brother. Her grandparents got pretty mad if even small rules were broken. Going outside after dark would probably get her killed. Jeffery, however, seemed unbothered in the slightest.

“Oh, you’ll be fine. I do it all the time. And I’m sure Carrie does it too. It’s not so bad when you know the grounds. She’s probably out there now.”

“Really?” Nickie gazed out the window again.

She could very clearly hear Carrie’s voice in her head, recalling something she had said not too long ago; “It ain’t no good doing things you shouldn’t. Especially around here. You’ll never know what you’ll stumble into, and when you do, you’ll probably lose your head for it.”

Nickie shifted uncomfortably. Carrie didn’t normally talk like that. The fact that she was so against Nickie breaking rules to begin with was the only reason she followed them in the first place.

“Maybe...we should just wait for her instead?” Nickie didn’t mean for it to sound like a question, but she lacked the confidence to be any sort of assertive with the man.

Jeffery sighed, “If we do, she’ll be gone all night. Don’t you worry, okay? I’ll be right inside here watching you. I got my pistol and you got your brain. Take a breather and see if you can find Carrie, alright?”

She didn’t want to. She really really didn’t want to.

“Alright.”

Fuck.

Jeffery, almost in a hurry, pushed her out the front door with a smile and a pat on the back. “Beautiful night. You’ll feel like a brand new person in no time! Call me when you find Carrie.”

He promptly shut the door, leaving Nickie on the porch. Even though the door was literally right behind her, it felt miles away. There was no porch light, just the glow from the windows and the deep darkness ahead of her. She shuttered, a chill going up her spine. Nothing about what was happening was making the anxiety in her stomach go away. It just made it grow ten times bigger.

She wanted to go back inside. Now.

“Carrie!” Nickie called into the darkness, “Carrie come on! Your dad needs you!”

From her spot on the porch, Nickie looked around, straining her eyes to see anything.

No movement or sound responded.

“Carrie! Don’t do this! I don’t want to be outside! You said it was bad! Can we please go in?”

Again, nothing.

Nickie shivered, cold and anxiety flowing through her. What was she even doing? She broke the rules, was letting Jeffery push her around, and was probably going to get in trouble.

No, screw all that.

“I’m going in!” She yelled, “Your dad’s gonna be mad, but I’m not doing this!”

She turned to grab the door handle.

“Nick!”

Nickie froze. It was Carrie’s voice.

“Nick, please! Help!”

Nickie whipped around faster than a bullet.

“Carrie!” Nickie screamed so loud that her throat stung.

Carrie’s voice was somewhere far in the darkness. Way beyond the porch and where her eyesight reached. She sounded hurt and scared. Terror gripped Nickie’s innards.

“Carrie! Where are you?” Nickie took a cautious step onto the porch stairs.

“Over here! I’m in the woods!” Carrie’s voice responded.

“W-what?”

The woods? Nickie knew Carrie usually never ventured even close to the wood’s border. What the hell was she doing all the way down there?”

“W-What happened?” Nickie’s voice shook as she called to her friend.

“I was chasing a loose chicken!” Carrie called back, “I fell and I think I broke my leg!”

Nickie gulped, anticipating what was coming next.

“Can you help me, Nick? Please!”

Nicki swallowed, “I’m...I’m gonna get your dad!”

Nickie was surprised that he didn’t come out when she started to scream. She was being so loud that she probably woke her grandparents and the rest of the house up. What was he doing in there?

“No!” Carrie yelled frantically, “I can hear Coyotes!”

“Oh shit...!” Nickie whimpered, “Oh shit shit shit!”

Nickie’s heart plummeted straight down to her feet.

‘This isn’t happening,’ she thought desperately, ‘This can’t be happening!’

“Please, Nick! Help me, please!”

Every bone in her body was screaming for her to run inside. But she couldn’t leave Carrie alone. Not now, not ever. She steeled her nerves.

“I’m coming, Carrie!”

Nickie began to sprint forward, but a firm, hard tug to the back of her shirt pulled her back into the house.

“Wha?! Carrie!” Nickie screamed, thrashing violently to be released from whatever had a hold on her.

She hit the floor of the house with a loud thud. Her vision went fuzzy for a moment and she stared at the ceiling in shock as the front door clicked shut. Panic consumed her almost instantly.

“No! Wait! Carrie’s out there! She’s—”

Nickie bolted up to see who had pulled her inside. Standing before her, panting and with rifle in hand, was Carrie. The two girls stared at each other, wide eyed.

“What?” Nickie breathed, “How did you—”

“I was upstairs taking a shower,” Carrie bit out, her voice strained.

Nickie’s breath was pulled from her body. She felt like she was floating or maybe drowning. She didn’t really know. Her eyes moved to the door, “Then...who was—?”

“I told you to never break those rules!” Carrie hissed, her eyes filled with intensity, “We got ‘em for a reason! I told you that! Do you even understand what almost happened to you!?”

“I—No...” Nickie said, tears welling up in her eyes, the gravity of the situation hitting her like a ton of bricks.

“Clearly. Don’t you ever do that again. Do you understand? Never ever again!”

Carrie began to stomp away towards the stairs. Nickie turned to watch her.

“Who was that?” Nickie asked, “The voice in the woods. Did you hear it? It said it was—”

Carrie stopped and spoke, cutting Nickie off, “I heard it all right. And I’ll tell you what it was; It wasn’t me.”



DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, STUDENT

MADISON AMBURGEY

“TRAUMA BONDS”

In a small quaint town in Pennsylvania nestled between hills and erie forests, there lived a girl named Meredith. She carried a burden far heavier than her small stature could hold. Her family tapestry of glued shattered glass, each shared was a symbol of pain and trauma inflicted upon her torn soul. Abuse lingered in the shadows of their home, casting long, haunting shadows over her tender heart. Her days were often cloaked in darkness, and at night she was paralyzed in her nightmares. Her once exuberant spirit was nothing more than a dying candle flickering as the flame slowly burnt out. Between her demands of work and the relentless pressure of school, she was stretched thin. Making everyday feel as if she was running a never ending marathon.

Beneath the weight of her endless responsibilities lay fresh scars, wounds that have salt perpetually rubbed by darkness. Her previous boyfriend's cruel words repeated throughout her brain. Created a constant reminder of the shame and hatred she carried deep within her every day. His mockery sewed themselves into her flesh as a badge of self loathing and doubt she can never remove. Meredith drifted through her life as a ghost in her own existence. Mer's battle with her body turned into an all out war that silently fought in her mind. She starved herself in the hopes to erase the imperfections she sees in her reflection.

Desperately searching for a small ray of sunshine in the midst of the storms. She finds Luka, a beacon of hope and sanctuary to protect her from the chaos around her. With him Mer found safety in the little wholesome moments, despite the category four storm surrounding her. Luka saw through Mer's facade she wore like a brick wall. He managed to break down the layers of her impenetrable wall of trauma. His gentle hands and heart full of empathy showed Mer she no longer hold on to her past. He held her close as she cried, whispering to her words of comfort as her cries turned to silence. Though the road ahead was filled with uncertainty, Meredith walked it with resiliency, her steps bold and true. For the love she felt, she had found her strength, and in the embrace of Luka, she had found peace.

As their bond deepened, Luka felt the weight of his secret grow heavier with each passing day. He longed to share the truth with Meredith, to be vulnerable to the demons that haunted him, but fear held him captive, chains forged from the screams of his past. Unknown to Meredith, Luka had his own scars from his own wars that raged deeper than she would have ever seen. He was born nothing but a burden to a family split into two. His childhood was trapped in a dumpster fire of chaos. Luka was haunted by his memories he was unable to escape. Luka found comfort in high darkness where he built his own fortress of solitude to protect him from the pain of reality. Each day he spent with Mer allowed him to slowly be released from the demons in his mind. As their love blossomed Luka wanted nothing more than to make Mer his. Guilt ravaged his mind and he knew he could not continue to hide behind the mask he made. With anxiety coursing through his veins he confesses his vulnerability to Mer, laying his heart on the line to be broken.

Terrified awaiting the response Mer held him close as a moth drawn to a flame. Together they face both of their demons together, forging a bond stronger than steel in the fire of shared pain. With them together side by side they found peace in each other's strength, allowing them to confront their past. Healing the wounds that were left untreated for far too long. They embrace in each other's arms, finding their safe place, their home, and finally their sanctuary. No matter how painful their journey was, the ending was worth the scars along the way.



ROBIN PAHOULIS

“QUESTIONS FOR ANOTHER DAY”

Balthazar stood outside of Jackie McGowan’s house. The weather was balmy, seventy degrees with a light breeze and no clouds in the sky. Despite this, he wore his leather jacket and sunglasses. As much as he loved the sun, as a vampire, it wasn’t his friend.

He hesitated before ringing the new electric doorbell. Two weeks ago, Jackie had confronted him with research she had done on his past. His cryptic responses and sarcastic redirections hadn’t fooled her. Somehow, she’d gotten access to the Cleveland Public Library’s archives in the same week she’d traveled across state lines to the small Pennsylvania town he’d been living in eighty some years ago. Balthazar didn’t know how she’d managed that, but he had theories. Most of them involved the Tuatha de Dannan or the Institute.

“How long were you in Thornesdale in the fifties?”

“Three years.”

“What happened to Eugene Byrne?”

“I turned him into a vampire. He was dying and had already drunk my blood anyway. He’s a good friend.”

After that, she had refused to talk to him for several days, during which most of her friends had also refused to talk to him. The only exceptions were Emily, who was Balthazar’s friend first, and Sonya, who only talked to him because she hated him. He had finally gotten Jackie to talk to him again by relaying an elaborate, dramatic apology to Jackie through Sonya. Once they were speaking again, he had agreed to answer Jackie’s questions about him. They had chosen a day and, after that, had been cordial if a little distant.

Today was the day he answered her questions. Hopefully, he would be able to repair the damage he had done to their relationship by lying about his past.

Jackie’s mom, Andy, answered the door. She was wearing an old t-shirt and black sneakers, with her auburn hair tied back. Balthazar smelled soil and coffee on her.

“You can come in. Jackie’s in the kitchen working on her homework,” Andy said. Out of view, Jackie cursed and erased something.

Balthazar followed Andy into the kitchen. Andy left the room to get her jacket, leaving the two teens alone together. Balthazar sat down across from Jackie and waited for her to make the first move. She looked up at him, then back at her homework. She frowned.

“I don’t know what I’m doing with this crap,” she said.

He looked at the book and worksheets in front of her. Precalculus. He shrugged. “I’m as lost as you are.” Andy came back into the room and handed Jackie a skinny can.

“Thanks,” Jackie said. For the first time in weeks, she sounded comfortable around him.

Andy turned to look at them. “Johnny’s at the yacht club with his shiny new boat. I’ll be outside, with that shiny new lake in the yard. Don’t do anything dumb, and if you need anything come get me. There’s Coke and dip in the fridge if you want it,” Andy said. “Oh, and actually get some work done this time. You two need to graduate at some point.”

“Got it, Mom,” Jackie said.

“I’m glad you two are back on speaking terms. Whatever happened between the two of you, I hope you’ve gotten it sorted out. You’re good for each other,” Andy said.

“We’re working on it. It’s going well,” Jackie said.

Balthazar blinked, taken aback. “Yeah. It’s going a lot better. We’re going to talk about it today.”

Andy smiled. “That’s good. Make yourselves comfortable and have a good talk. Like I said, I’ll be outside if you need anything.”

“Thank you for the hospitality, Mrs. McGowan. And good luck with the backyard lake,” Balthazar said. Andy rolled her eyes. “I appreciate that. I’ll need the extra luck with this one.”

Once Andy had left, Jackie looked at Balthazar. Her hazel eyes were dark, her brows pinched together. “So. Now we talk.”

“Yep. Now we talk,” he said. “Ask away.”

“First thing. I never got an answer as to how you manage to play football as a vampire. Since you’re older than you said, I figure it has something to do with that? Like, vampire powers and weaknesses change with age?” she asked.

She was smart. She didn’t know exactly what let him get away with this stuff, but she knew enough to make an educated guess. She would make a good scientist.

“It’s a combination of age, how recently I’ve fed, and whether I’m wearing sunscreen.” He folded his hands behind his neck.

“Sunscreen. Sure. That makes sense,” Jackie said.

“It’s magic sunscreen.”

“Yeah, I kind of figured. So, onto the next question. After you and Eugene left town, where did you go? And how the heck did you end up locked in a coffin in Kitty’s cellar?” She wrinkled her nose at the last question, clearly remembering the smell and how he had looked. He had looked like crap, for the record.

“We originally left for New York. We ended up in Canada because of a scandal involving an immortal billionaire who my father has trade deals with. I was sent to clean up the mess. As to how I ended up in that coffin, I’d blame my sister, but we had made up by that point. The truth is, I’m not entirely sure why the woman who boxed me did it. She had a lot of reasons to do what she did,” Balthazar said. His running theory was that it had to do with her psychopathic boyfriend, the fact that Balthazar had killed her grandfather, or because she had wanted to take power in the supernatural world. Knowing her, probably all three.

“Explain how you ended up in Canada. You need visas for that. Unless it’s a vampire politics thing?” Jackie said. She looked out the window, thinking. Then she nodded and looked back at him, smiling faintly. “It is a vampire politics thing, isn’t it?”

He nodded. When he smiled, it was crooked. “Yeah. My father was able to arrange the paperwork for us to go abroad. We had a cover story for it if anyone important asked, but it never came up. I don’t know where Gene went after I was boxed. It would be nice to catch up.”

They were silent for a moment. The only sounds in the house were her pencil scratching on the worksheet and her cat chirping and growling at something upstairs.

Balthazar got up to get a Coke from the fridge. When he came back, Jackie had moved onto a different worksheet, although she hadn’t touched it. She rubbed her pop can, her leg bouncing slightly.

He sat back down and cracked open the Coke. He took a drink.

“Blackthorne recognizes you from before,” Jackie said.

Balthazar smirked. “She’s been around a lot longer than you or your parents know. She’s gonna be turning 350 soon.”

“She was a teenager during the Salem Witch Trials, right? I looked into that, too. It’s kind of strange, that an actual witch would be on that side of-”

The sound of a wailing, frightened cat echoed through the room. Jackie stood up, looking around. “Where are you?” she said. The cat only cried in response. Balthazar pinched his nose. Where did her dumb cat get stuck this time? “It’s probably stuck under a cabinet or something. It’ll get out on its own,” he said. Jackie glared at him.

The meowing paused, then resumed, louder and higher pitched than before. Balthazar tilted his head, angling his ear toward the sound. It was somewhere in the kitchen. But it had been upstairs, and he hadn’t seen it come down. And even if it had somehow snuck by him, there was no way that cat had gotten stuck in a kitchen cabinet.

Unless. . .

“He’s stuck in the wall, Jackie.”

“He’s what?” she said, her voice pitching up at the end. “You’ve gotta be kidding me. How the heck does a cat get stuck in a wall?”

Balthazar threw up his hands. “Beats me. Why don’t you ask him?” She smiled, wide-eyed and almost feral. “I will when I get him out. Now how do I get him out?”

“You could reach in and pull him out,” Balthazar said, dripping sarcasm.

For a moment, Jackie pulled a face. Then, she perked up. “Yes, I can do that. I walk through walls a lot; this isn’t any different.”

Balthazar blinked and rubbed the back of his neck. “Can you explain the “walking through walls” thing to me?”

“After I get the cat,” she said. And phased right through the sink and into the wall. Balthazar stared in horror at where his girlfriend had disappeared. The cat hissed, then meowed loudly. Jackie swore. Then she came back out of the wall, through the sink, and into the real world. The cat in her arms squirmed and whined.

Jackie set the cat down. It ran under a cabinet and started purring. Balthazar shook his head. That cat wasn't just dumb, it was crazy.

She looked at the scratches on her arms. "Aw, crap. I hope you're happy with yourself, you little jerk."

Balthazar couldn't look away from her arms. His throat was suddenly sore. On instinct, he reached for the Coke.

Jackie darted to the bathroom to clean her arms. When she came back, she had cartoon Band-Aids over the scratches.

He could still smell the blood.

She noticed his discomfort, rubbing her arm self-consciously. "Right. Vampire boyfriend," she said.

He forced himself to relax. He had already fed last night in preparation for today. That was part of why he had to wear the jacket. The sun's influence was stronger the more recently he'd fed.

"It's no big deal. I've endured much worse," he said.

"Clearly, judging by the fifties," she said, and sat down. "Tell me more about that. About what happened with Gene and Cindy, and the demon in the attic."

"Well, it all started when Gene and his dumb friends messed around in the wrong part of the woods. Sound familiar?" Balthazar said. He felt lighter. Free. Like the last couple of weeks hadn't changed everything for the worse.

Jackie snickered. "Yeah, really familiar. So familiar I could have been there."

She could have. Judging by the clear, knowing looks they exchanged, they both knew it. But that was a question for another day. Today, they were talking about Gene and Cindy, and the vampires who had ruined their lives. Balthazar hoped the ending to that story didn't repeat, like everything else from the fifties seemed to be doing.

If it did, he wasn't sure he could walk away this time.

But something told him Jackie, unlike Cindy, would.

ELEANOR RAMOS

“SIPPING SUNSETS AND SAVORING SCARS”

Journal Entry #1457 | 9 September
Sipping Sunsets and Savoring Scars

When I say I want to age gracefully, I mean I want to have wrinkles and sunspots from spending far too much time outdoors. I want arthritis in my knees from climbing and carpal tunnel in my wrists from holding onto the ones I love too tightly. I want even more scars across my legs and elbows from tripping as I run too fast. I want to wear hearing aids because I went to too many loud concerts when I was a teenager.

I want my voice to be so soft and raspy from singing too loud down the highway. I want my stomach and curves to be soft from eating delicious foods. I want a few extra pounds on the hips from baking oh-so-many Christmas cookies for the neighbors. I want to dye my hair hot pink and drink Lucky Cherries on my front porch. I want to pierce my nose just to spite those who said I shouldn't. I want to have my license revoked because I can't see after years of reading books on poetry, the stars, and philosophy. I want a plethora of knowledge on love and war, and I want everything my heart desires for no other reason than I want it.

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR POETRY, STUDENT

MACKENZIE MEEKER

“PAPA IS THERE”

In another universe, I am nine years old.

In another universe, my papa is still here.

I like to imagine that in another place somewhere intangible, it is summer all the time

Papa is there.

I am there.

We are shucking corn in the garage and the smell of dirt permeates the air.

I peel and peel the waxy peel of the corn as fast as I can, but Papa takes his time as there is no reason to rush.

Why rush when you are spending time with a grandchild you love?

We throw the corn into the garbage can like basketball players trying to shoot a three pointer.

In another universe, Papa and I are still shucking corn together.

In another universe, I am running around the house that is as old as my mother.

The house shades Papa as he sits in his blue chair as he times me on his silver watch.

I get ready and then I sprint through the grass as it grabs at my feet.

All I hear is the wind rushing in my ears as it tries to hold me back.

I round the corner and the finish line is in sight.

Papa tells me my time and I decide to go again.

No matter how long I run around the house, Papa would always time me no matter what.

In another universe, I am still small, running around the house, and knowing that Papa will always be at the finish line.

In another universe, Papa and I are playing badminton with our blue rackets.

Papa sends the birdie into the air with the agility of a professional tennis player.

I jump with all my might to try and hit the birdie, but it sails over my head as it sticks its tongue out at me.

The summer air sticks to my skin as I race around the yard.

The smell of barbecue hits the air as grandma makes burgers and hotdogs.

I spent many summers unaware of how lucky I am to be outside with Papa.

In another universe, I am outside with Papa trying to hit the birdies that are catapulted into the air.

In another universe, I have abandoned my training wheels and adorned myself with a pink princess helmet.

I feel uneasy and unbalanced on two wheels, but Papa is there if I fall.

It is hard and the feeling of giving up is growing strong in my little brain.

I become frustrated and despondent that I may never feel the luxury of riding a bike without training wheels, but Papa is there if I fall.

When I am ready to give up and abandon my bike, that has become my mortal enemy.

Papa encourages me to try one more time and it is the most magical thing when I maintain my balance and race down the street like a chicken with its head cut off.

In another universe, even though I feel unbalanced papa is there if I fall.

In another universe, it is the summer of 2009, Papa is coming inside from basking in the warm sun and having the breeze kiss his wrinkled skin.

Papa has finished feeding the squirrels that live in the tree in our front yard.

The squirrels grab the peanuts out of Papa's ancient hand and nibble on the peanut that has been gifted to them.

The squirrels will forever have filled bellies and an old man that loves to feed them.

Papa is coming back inside from pulling the weeds in the front yard, his white gloves stained with dirt.

The house feels better now that Papa has gotten rid of the itchy weeds that invade the house's personal space.

Papa is coming back inside as his blue truck is resting in the garage and his tools are hanging out on his big oak shelf.

The white garage door closes behind him and Papa is once again gone.

In another universe, I am nine still, I rush out of my mom's red van, and make a beeline for the white garage door because Papa is still there.

Papa is still there.

I am still there.



KATE CARTER AWARDS

PATRICK MCKINNEY

“THE IMPORTANCE OF I,”

Honorable Mention written for Professor Amanda D'Alessandro's EN 101

You are our swiss army knife.” The head coach rattled off the names of every player on the team besides me. “You are our swiss army knife.” The assistant coach says after the head coach fails to mention me. I remember sitting there, everyone looking at me waiting for my name, the smell of body odor pungent. For context, I played around 4 different positions in that game. “You are all we have next year.” the head coach told me, staring into my soul. His failures made it the last time I would step on a soccer field. I have played soccer since I was 5 years old. 11 years later, my journey ends, in the hands of some fool.

My father told me, “If a window of opportunity appears, do not close the shade on it.”

At that time during fall, I was a multi-sport athlete, both running cross country and playing soccer. I decided to only run cross country the following year. That decision was one of the hardest of my life. The next season in cross-country, I recorded 6 personal best races out of 10. I would say the decision paid off. I changed my primary shoes. I became a RUNNER. 98% of the reason I decided to run in the first place was to stay conditioned for soccer. I went to one of my brother's races. The Riverside night race to be exact. The only race during the season to take place at night. Arguably the best race environment of the year. That was the other 2%. When I got into running, my goal was to be good enough to be varsity and contribute to the team while becoming more fit for soccer. That was not the case in the long run. I would make this decision over and over again. I believe I made the correct choice.

OVERCOMING THE IDEA OF FAILURE

I count the steps
I take a deep breath
I raise the pole
I run. I jump.
Leaping over failure
And into a new journey

Originally, my goal was to play soccer in college. After a very successful first season of pole vaulting earlier in the year, my goal has shifted. I pole vaulted for probably about 3 weeks during my freshman year of high school. In my sophomore year of indoor track, I revisited an old ally. My personal best was 8 feet 6 inches indoor, and then I achieved 10 feet outdoor. The week after my outdoor season ended, I achieved 11 feet. Unfortunately, if that came a week sooner, I would have potentially moved on to districts. Pole-vaulting has slowly become part of my identity. I am slowly closing in on our school record and I continue to get better. The goal now is to go to college for a small sum of money and continue to vault in college. I believe that I can make it to the next level, I put in the proper work and have excellent coaches by my side to help me.

Pole-vaulting can be frustrating though. The routine has to be the same every time. You need to stand in the right spot, grip the pole in the right spot, and run the same speed every time. Not to mention planting properly, turning, and throwing the pole. There is a lot that goes into pole vaulting. It can be a frustrating process. But failure is not an option. There is no plan B anymore. I believe I can make it to the top, that I can break the school record, that I can make it to the state meet, and that I will still be competing when I go to college. But I should never rule out the possibility of going for running. That would be a long shot. I currently run a 19:12 5k. I would have to be sub-16 to have a shot. I acknowledge the fact that it will take a lot of work to get there, but I am willing to do such. Whether it be hitting the gym 5 days a week, waking up at 5 a.m. for practice, or practicing on my day off, I am willing to do it.

THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Aside from the obvious people in my family, there are many people with me on my journey. My friend group makes up a big part of my identity. My friends do the same sports as me, we elect to take the same classes at school, work the same jobs, etc. I feel that if one person did not talk to me complimenting my shoes in 7th grade, then my life would be drastically different. I believe that if this one person did not make an enormous impact on my life, then I would have a completely different identity. One person. One person has the ability to make the biggest impact. I highlight this one person because, without him, I would not be friends with anyone I am currently friends with,

Twisting and turning the handle spins
One spin is all to win
Out with surprise
The Jack in the Box begins to rise

For context, the game we play when we get together is typically Jackbox. Jackbox has a series of collections of games. Relating the Jackbox game to a Jack in the Box introduces a new topic while relating to my old message that one person, or spin, is all it takes to launch a chain reaction, a chain reaction of friendship and loyalty. I will never forget the impact of this one person, even if one day we drift apart.

THE TIME WE LOSE CAN LEAD TO LONG-LASTING MEMORIES

I would be lying if I said I didn't spend a fair amount of my time working. During the summer I worked around 37 hours a week and currently, I work a valet job once a week but for double the pay. Next summer I plan to work at the Geneva Marina like I did last year for the same amount of hours while continuing to work my valet job a couple of times a week. I believe that it is important to save and earn money early in life because it can take some of the burden off your parents while giving enormous opportunities to make memories with your friends. Having even a little amount of cash to simply fill up your gas tank can make a huge impact on parents. Prices continue to rise and salaries will not always follow. I'm getting off track with my main point. Having money gives me the ability to go out with my friends without burdening my parents. I can go and see the movies, the ability to go and get McDonald's. AND I ENJOY SPENDING MY TIME WORKING. I work with multiple of my friends, and I am blessed to say I do.

I am grateful, to say the least, for my life. I have been blessed. I am willing to embrace the new challenges that come my way. I am willing to work for what I believe I deserve. I am ecstatic that I can call the people I hold closest to me my friends. I am me.

XIMENA REA

“ACTUALLY IT'S NOT FINE I WANTED TO CRY EARLIER: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY”

3rd Place Winner written for Professor Rose Nemunaitis EN 101

My name is Ximena Rea. I think you should know that I think a lot but tend not to say much of it out loud. I like to romanticize little things in my life, music, and reading. I'm unsure when I changed so much, but that is the secret of growing up. Growing up is something no one tends to realize is happening; the only people aware are those around you. However, now that I'm an adult, it is easier to spot the differences.

I was born on May 23, 2005. I arrived at 3:15 p.m.; ironically enough, this was right after school. It would also become the last day of school for most of my school life, which is very unique to me. My sisters often remember coming home right after school and my father taking them right after school to see me. I am the last of four girls. My father hoped for a boy he hoped to name after his dad, Eugene. Despite not getting a boy, my parents decided on Ximena. I am named after a famous Spanish newscaster, “Jimena de la Quintana.” Sadly, I do not have a middle name, but I keep one in mind for future endeavors. I think its important to note that all of my sibling's names are the “wrong” spelling. I think it shows our uniqueness and adds to our Mexican-American heritage. I am also a Gemini baby, born on a full moon. My mother says her mother would say, “All children come to us on full moons-” special moons. It is funny that my sisters and I were born early. Although I was very sick as a child, my dad often brought up the folktale of the “Virgin Mary.” How she grants wishes to the people of Jalisco in hopes of being cured, he took me there. I'm unsure how true this story is, but I got better. I do not remember much of being a baby, like most people. Despite I do enjoy hearing little stories of little me.

I do, however, remember the beginning of my school life. In preschool, I remember my first day being highly emotional. Before preschool, my mom and I spent a lot of time together. I remember my mom waking me up, picking my outfits, and getting ready. Getting changed, brushing my teeth, and getting my hair done for the day, all with her. I remember arriving in the giant building and holding onto her hand while she met my teachers for the first time. But then school started, and she had to leave. Immediately, I began to cry. Although in the picture we took together that day you can not tell I was crying; it's the first time I cried at school. I remember pulling only my mom, begging her not to leave. If you ask her about it now, she probably won't remember, but I do. Even though my first day of school was teary, I remember being happy for the rest of my time there. Playing on the computer, trying new foods, making my first best friend that I loved but don't remember now, and my plastic bookbag. Looking back, I love how my first year of school connected to my life directly. Because love and life are now.

Now, elementary was very different. I was a very extroverted kid. I spent a lot of time outside and anywhere but my house. I once sat and asked myself why I had spent so much time in other people's houses and not my own. I am still trying to come to the conclusion of why. I know it was not because of my home life in particular or because I was lonely, but like I said, reflection is how you know you've grown up. My mother also tends to ask me now how I was such a flamboyant child. I would get in trouble for speaking, not to the point where I had to be moved away from others or be punished for my behavior, but just enough for teachers to tell my parents. That being said, I also remember my first days of elementary school. Each year, I spent my days talking and talking and crying about little things I still remember. I remember, in particular, crying about failing a test and my teacher giving me a stern talk about studying. Essentially, elementary school me was often very talkative and outgoing.

Middle school. The most significant change of my life. It's a bit dramatic, but that's me. My middle school years blur together. For me, and like most people, it is when you start to feel awkward, although, at the time, I did not really think that until looking back. My first day of sixth grade was horrid. Again, it's dramatic as there are worse things in life than forgetting your schedule, getting yelled at, and slightly tearing up about it. Thankfully, I did not cry. However, nothing prepared me for meeting new people and the hierarchies of honors and "dumb people classes." Seventh and eighth grade, emotional roller coaster. I spent much of my time with my best friend Silvia in our "dumb classes"; ironically enough, a dumb class is not where we met. She will always be remembered as the one who gave me a piece of infinite wisdom that changed the trajectory of my life. I told her about every single time I cried until finally, she told me, "You know, Ximena, you really need to stop crying at school." I know it sounds a bit harsh, a lot harsh, but she was correct; there was no point in crying at school. I can really only remember one time where crying worked in my favor and where I wasn't yelled at further by teachers or parents for crying. But this led to something very different, something negative to something positive, and it also got me to where I am now. So, for Silvia, I will forever be grateful.

Before I start high school, I'd like to bring up some minor details about the tears shed throughout middle school and why they are so unimportant. My first tears, embarrassingly enough, were about a boy. No, not in that way, not really. Middle school is where I met my first best friend, who was a boy. I remember being so happy when I was around him. I was unsure why that was, and then it got ruined because boys in middle school will do that. I remember being so angry that people convinced we were together because we were friends, an anger that made me so angry I would just cry instead of speaking up. Looking back, it seems useless to cry about something like that because we're just friends. Another cry was the school in general. I was so under and overwhelmed with what was happening and the people around me. Again, it seems useless as I longingly remember my classmates and how and when I met them, and a tiny part of me hopes they remember me too, although they probably do not.

High school is where my life starts to circle back. Disappointingly, my first year of high school was cut short due to COVID-19. I vividly remember March 13th, my last school day before spring break. Or so we thought. I remember kids I had known since kindergarten skipping school that day and hardly ever seeing them again. Now, my personality did change this year and in middle school, but it wasn't until my junior year that I felt the adverse effects happening to me. The negative was bottling up everything happening to me or handling all the negative things that

happened so intensely that I wondered what I did to deserve them. Part of me felt I deserved them, not the super bad things, mainly making the wrong decisions. From the ages of 13 to 16, I've just ignored and not fully processed what happened to me. From extreme things like my grandpa dying on my birthday to little things like my friends not showing up to my 17th birthday party that I excitedly plan and look back on and hate. But I digress, although the pain from my birthday is somewhat connected. This takes me back to again, realizing I am growing up and moving away from the heavily tinted rose glasses in life.

I know being quiet is not necessarily a good thing, and crying all the time isn't good either. But I'm happy with how I present myself and hold myself emotionally. Crying is something positive to me now. It also makes me human and imperfect because, as an 18-year-old girl, that's precisely what I am human! It is important to remember that I stopped crying at school for years even though I really wanted and tried not to; I sometimes cried. Because I realize now that crying is human instinct and I am not always in the wrong. No matter how headstrong I can be, the adults and peers around me can still be wrong. Now, I look back at my life and realize that this is all a story I can read and fall in love with someday. And how I love music because it is one thing I grew up with and have noticed the changes. I romanticize things because I can because no one is here to yell at me or stop me from loving the little things.

KIM LORENZ

“THE GIRL FROM GERMANY”

2nd Place Winner written for Professor Amanda D'Alessandro's EN 101

The Life as an Exchange student

I like your accent. Where are you from?” I don’t know how often I’ve heard this sentence in the past two years. When I first got here on the second of August 2022, I did not know what to expect. My first time out of Europe. My first time in America. My first time being away from my parent. And all of that by myself. I didn’t know if I would like it over here. “Why did I do this?” were my thoughts on the plane. I will never forget the day I left Germany to start a new chapter in my life, studying in the United States. My best friends, my mom, my dad, and my brother all came to the airport to say bye to me. If I had to talk about the most emotional day in my life, I would probably choose this day. Hab eine gute Zeit, Kimi my dad said before I went through the security at the airport. Me, my mom and my best friends were crying in each other’s arms to say bye. And then the journey started.

An hour flight from Münster to Frankfurt. Nine hours from Frankfurt to Chicago and two hours from Chicago to Cleveland. So, it was the first time for me to be in the United States. My first thought: everything is so huge. I still don’t know how I didn’t get lost at the airport in Chicago. I had a long layover in Chicago, so I bought some food. In Germany, it is a prejudice that American food is really unhealthy. And with that, the prejudice was confirmed. When I arrived in Cleveland, I got very nervous. I knew one teammate would pick me up, so the first time I spoke English with an American came closer and closer. “Rede einfach ohne darüber nachzudenken. Es ist nicht schlimm Fehler zu machen.” my mom would tell me to encourage me to speak English without thinking of making mistakes. Well, I wish it would’ve been that easy. When I was younger, my grandpa would always say, Wer immer tut was er schon kann, bleibt immer das, was er schon ist. “If you always do what you can already do, you will always remain what you already are.”. I was scared to make any mistakes while talking, and I was scared that people would make fun of me. But then I relied on my grandpa’s saying and thought I couldn’t get better at speaking English if I didn’t try it. It took me a couple of weeks to realize that, and at the beginning, my time here was very hard. Different language, far away from home, and a different culture.

Building a second home

After a while, I got used to the new language. “Kim, your English has gotten so much better,” people would tell me. I felt like I could be myself again. I am a very extroverted person, and I hate being quiet. So, with me not speaking the language and having problems understanding people, I had a hard time feeling comfortable, and all I wanted to do was to go back to Germany. With that, the people are different than people in Germany, and the culture is different. I wasn’t used to all that and didn’t know if I would ever get used to it. Throughout my freshman year and the beginning of my sophomore year, I learned a lot. I got used to a new culture, made a lot of friends, learned that I won’t learn the language if I’m afraid of making mistakes, and I

learned how to love my new life over here. Instead of being sad to be away from home, I learned to appreciate that I have someone to miss at home. One big part that helped me to feel more comfortable was making new friends. When I struggled in a class, there was always someone to help me out; when I was homesick, there was always someone that made me feel like this is my home. In our team, we are four people from Germany. We are all close, and it took us a short time to get close to become friends. We speak the same language, have the same culture, and talk about the differences we see between Germany and the United States. We identify with our culture, and our team calls us "The Germans". That shows that language and culture are a big part of our lives.

"Kim, can you say jewelry?" my friends would ask me, making fun of my accent. Instead of feeling sad, I would just answer the question with, "How many languages do you speak". After a few weeks, I learned that having an accent is not something I should be ashamed of. It is a privilege to speak more than one language. My accent is part of me, and it shows where I'm from. If people hear me talking, they most of the time ask me where I'm from and then ask questions about Germany. This is such a good way to talk about different cultures and to learn about other countries, which can be very helpful.

From Fussball to soccer

"Kim, you are talking German to me on the field." my teammate who played next to me would say after the game. When I play soccer, my brain shuts down. I don't think about anything but the game. In my first couple of games, I would still think in German, and that's the reason for me speaking German on the field. The sport is a big part of my identity, and without it, I wouldn't be in the United States. But even in the sport, there are a lot of differences compared to home, and I had to get used. In Germany, we have practice three times a week and one game on Sunday. We don't have College divisions, so we play for club teams. After practice, we sit together with our team, have a drink, and talk about everything. When I first got here, we had two weeks of preseason. Two practices a day to prepare for two games a week in season, lifting, team lunch, team dinner, team bonding activities, and so on. I wasn't used to spending that much time with my team. After I got used to it, I started loving it.

I love the game, and having the chance to play it every single day is great for me. Die Amis sind wirklich stolz auf ihr Land, oder? I and my German teammate would say, joking about how proud the Americans are and how they play the national anthem before every single game. The practice and the style of playing were very different from how it was in Germany. It's not as tactical but way more physical. I was lucky that I am a physical player, but I still really had to get used to the physicality. When my family asks me about how I made friends in a foreign country, I always answer it with through soccer. People with the same interests and the same hobby are coming together. It could've not been easier for me to make friends. I love telling them about my life in Germany. It's part of my identity, and it explains why I am who I am.

Die Familie ist alles

When talking about who I am, I have to mention my Family. Familie Lorenz vom Hof Schulze-Greiving, people would call us. I live on a farm with my grandparents, my uncle, my mom, my dad, and my brother. Die Familie ist der Ort, an dem wir lernen, uns selber zu finden (Cantty) (The family is the place where we learn to find ourselves) -German saying. This describes the relationship I have with my family pretty well. I am the person I am because of my family and because of the way my parents raised me. They are like my best friends, and they always told me Mach was du willst solange du niemanden verletzt und dein Leben im Griff hast. (Do whatever you want as long as you don't hurt anyone and your life is under control). They never gave me any prohibitions, and with that, I got really close to them. I tell them everything, and with me not being at home,

we Facetime a lot to keep each other updated. Every time I Facetime them, I feel like I'm home. Speaking German, hearing my parents saying Hallo Mäuschen, wie geht's dir makes me feel like home. Home is not only the place where you live. Home can be your family, friends, or everything else.

We identify ourselves through language and culture. In the United States, I am the girl with an accent from Germany, in Germany, I am the girl who was in the United States and who got "Americanized". The way you speak will always be part of your identity. I as an exchange student, sometimes miss my culture and speaking my language. I started thinking and dreaming in English, and it is a privilege to speak two languages. The most important things in my life are friends, soccer, family, and my education. Since I moved to the United States, I have learned a lot about my own culture, other cultures, and about myself.

I can relate to what Gloria Anzaldua is saying in her essay "How to Tame a wild tongue". Having an accent and a different culture than most of the people in the country where you live is not always easy. You miss your culture and speaking your own language. Throughout the year, I learned how to deal with it and to be thankful that I can experience it. It is such an advantage to live in a foreign country, learn the language and their culture, and I grew up through this experience.

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MICAH GEISE

“SHARIF'S ARGUMENT AGAINST US MILITARY VOCABULARY”

1st Place Winner written for Professor Amanda D'Alessandro's EN 101

From the first line of Solmaz Sharif's poem “Look,” Sharif begins crafting her argument and making a statement. Sharif's goal in writing this is not to entertain her audience or to receive glory and fame, but to leave a lasting legacy that creates an impression on the entire human race for endless generations. As an American-Iranian who spent her childhood constantly moving throughout the United States and continually feeling like an outcast, she felt like she needed to question everything, which led her to create the poem “Look” (Sharif 563). Her poem “Look” delves deep into the way we use language and how traumatic war really is, especially for those who do not live in war-stricken areas and often take their situation for granted. Sharif's main argument in her poem “Look” is the way that the United States government exploits the English language by distorting and reevaluating the definition of certain words, changing their connotation and significance into wicked apparatuses of war. Sharif counters the United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms by creating a poem that uses words in that dictionary with different meanings, and she even mocked them in her “Special Events for Homeland Security” (Sharif 575). I believe that Solmaz Sharif, author of “Look,” displays her central argument by using language, revealing the trauma of war, and using the structure of a poem to her advantage.

One of Sharif's techniques used to aid in identifying her main argument is her use of language. Her use of language is different from other writers because she uses poems to express her opinion. She uses language to counter the language used by the United States government, and does so successfully. Sharif uses words found in the United States Department of Defense Dictionary in her poem to bring light to the injustice done by the American military. For example, she uses the words “probably destroyed” to describe how the United States said a Middle Eastern town was bombed. She continues by saying, “the faces of buildings torn off into dioramas,” which not only confirms that the town was definitely destroyed, but also points out the way that the United States military manipulated this particular word (Sharif 565). A line from her poem that supports her central argument from this approach is “it matters what you call a thing” (Sharif 565). Throughout the poem, Sharif makes it very clear that there is importance in the way words are used. For example, she uses military words to describe a sexual meeting in “Special Events for Homeland Security,” which proves her point that context and definitions are very important. The process in which Sharif describes this reveals the problems the United States armed forces create by twisting the meaning of words to cover up the horrors they do.

Another supporting detail for Sharif's central assertion is the traumatic and violent nature of war. Sharif reveals how the military uses certain vocabulary to make the violent nature of war seem less gruesome. For example, the military uses the phrase “pinpoint target” to communicate to each other about who will be their next fatal victim. Sharif follows up with “one lit desk lamp / and a nightgown walking past the window” (Sharif

569). Here, she highlights how the military uses inanimate objects to dehumanize people for death to seem less gruesome. To combat this claim, she discusses how violent and tragic war really is by saying, “everybody shot in the head side by side... it was kinda like seeing a dead dog or a dead cat lying” (Sharif 566). She describes war in a way that does not make it easier for her readers to accept or cope. She wants her audience to fully understand that war is a heart-breaking crisis that should not be taken lightly.

A significant feature of her primary claim is how her argument is written as a poem instead of an essay. Using a poem is a crucial component in the preparation of her argument. Poems are more emotionally expressive than a typical essay, and in crafting an argument where emotions play a key role, Sharif makes great use of the nature of a poem. Sharif is able to use a more creative written style, highlighting certain aspects, and providing a better understanding of the depiction of her own experience. She uses figurative language, such as alliteration, to describe her “safe house” on pages 572 and 573. Additionally, it allows for hidden meanings, where what was said on paper may not be the main, or only, possible interpretation. For example, when she says, “teach your mouth to say / honey when you enter the kitchen,” she is really emphasizing the way people have to go about life in the Middle East to avoid getting in trouble. The expressive nature of poems allows Sharif to strengthen her argument.

As a reader, she has definitely convinced me to believe in her claims. I believe her intention is to enlighten the readers about the deceptive language used by the U.S. Department of Defense and the true violence of war. She provides supporting details and conveys her beliefs with confidence. I think she wants her audience to understand how tragic war really is and is not something that should be taken lightly. Through this, she hopes that others will be able to get a tiny glimpse of the terrible violence that war produces.

Solmaz Sharif undoubtedly created a strong argument in her poem “Look” against the U.S. Military Department of Defense. She accused the military of manipulating language to redefine words, then she was able to back up her central argument by creating a poem that exhibited her main claims. By using language, revealing the trauma of war, and using the structure of a poem to her advantage, she accurately depicts her central argument and intentions for writing this poem. Her poem reveals the cruel nature of the U.S. military and how “it matters what you call a thing” (Sharif 565). In conclusion, Solmaz Sharif’s poem “Look” functions as an argument against the U.S. military’s manipulation of language.

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MACKENZIE MEEKER

“A QUEEN'S MOURNING AND HER INFLUENCE ON THE VICTORIAN ERA”

written for my Victorian Literature course

In today's world, if you told someone you were having a photoshoot with your grandpa's corpse, you would probably get some wide-eyed glances and collective gasps. Though in the Victorian era, this was the norm since death was such a giant part of Victorian culture. In the Victorian era, you were not expected to live long as there was a high infant mortality rate and you would probably live till you were middle aged if you were lucky. The Victorian era was an unhygienic time, which led to many causes of illness and diseases. Many Victorians took to remembering their loved ones by the use of post-mortem photography, which is just as it sounds where the recently deceased would be photographed with the help of props to make them look more alive. Likewise, jewelry, burial clubs (which ensured that they had the money to bury family members), and the wearing of black was expected of the family members especially the women. Lastly, Queen Victoria of Great Britain would be the driving catalyst for this immense culture change after her husband Prince Albert passes away.

To begin, Queen Victoria was by far the most influential monarch of Britain with her sixty-four years of reign. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were highly involved with the boom of photography as they loved to document their family and adoration for each other. Likewise, Queen Victoria is highly known for her life-long mourning after Prince Albert passes from Typhoid fever. Helen Trompeteler states, “Albert's death with a then unparalleled boom in commercial photography and its associated media enabled royal grief to become a collective public experience”(Trompeteler). In the Victorian era, the use of photography was only for the wealthy families, who could afford the expense of this growing medium. Something that is incredibly interesting is that after Prince Albert died, Queen Victoria had a bust of his likeness created by William Theeds. This was then included in the family photos and I think that is an interesting way to remember someone. It is as if Prince Albert is still part of the family, but in more of a spirituality sense. On the other hand, Queen Victoria also started the memorabilia jewelry such as having a small portrait of the deceased on a bracelet. Even a lock of hair would be kept from the deceased which would be kept in a locket of sorts. Helen Trompeteler states, “However, the increasing affordability of photography allowed the middle classes to adopt this tradition with the widespread introduction of photo-jewelry”(Trompeteler). Queen Victoria and her children were the first to wear jewelry to honor Prince Albert, but the more popular it became the more accessible it became.

To continue, Queen Victoria was not the only factor in bringing death photography mainstream. French inventor Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre created the Daguerreotype camera in “1839” (Daguerre, Library of Congress). If the Victorians did not have the Daguerreotype camera, I believe that Victorian death photography would not have been so greatly popular. Back in 2019, there was a new exhibition at the Smithsonian pertaining to the showing of varying daguerreotype photographs. Ryan Smith, a writer for the Smithsonian magazine interviewed the curator Anna Shumard about the showing. Shumard stated, “The spectral nature of daguerreotypes lends them an intriguing eeriness, and their duality of mirror and image implicates the viewer

in what they're seeing in a way common to no other medium"(Shumard). When I was looking at these varying photographs, I could feel the eeriness of the portraits or family portraits. They are powerful, but also there is such a gnawing feeling when looking at the juxtaposition of the dead and living. Though the daguerreotype also paved the way for the middle class and working class as it became a cheaper alternative to getting a portrait painted. Alex Postrado, is a poet, knowledgeable about literature, and a writer for Lore Thrill. Postrado explains the impact of the daguerreotype as "Still quite costly for many, but as the number of daguerreotype photographers rose, the price for each photography session fell just enough for the working class to join in"(Postrado). So, the daguerreotype allowed for anyone to express their grief and mourn for their loved ones. Death was always looming over the Victorians and many did not expect to live past their forties. This innovative photography allowed the working class to be able to remember their loved ones in a way that was permanent. If it was not for the daguerreotype camera, I am sure that many Victorians would have had to forget about their deceased loved ones. In today's world, we are able to see how special this practice was from mothers holding deceased infants in a tight embrace to a deceased family member cradled between family members that are still living.

Moreover, with the ever growing rise of life saving medical treatment that is available to everyone, it has helped to expand a human's life far into their nineties. Though in the Victorian era the life expectancy for an average person was their forties, or even infant mortality rates were incredibly high. In today's world we have medicines, flu shots, and the handy method of washing our hands with antibacterial soap. The Victorians did not have access to these utensils to keep their health at its peak. There was not only disease as well as with the rise of consumerism and industrialism, Victorians were buying products that would lead to their demise. Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb goes over the common killers of the Victorian era such as wallpaper. Dr. Lipscomb states, "As wallpaper sales escalated, so did the reports of unexplained deaths and illnesses in the home"(Lipscomb). Victorians loved the gorgeous green hue of these wallpapers, but that green hue was actually due to the paper being made with arsenic. So, Victorian people were inviting death into their homes through these deadly wallpapers. Also, due to the heavy smog that would infiltrate the streets of Britain, many Victorians would leave their windows closed. Victorians would then be left to simmer in the poisonous fumes, the arsenic would cling to dust and the damp houses did not help as it would increase the growth of fungus in the walls. Lastly, the Victorians also had diseases such as dysentery and typhoid fever, which were the main diseases of the century. The mixing of sewage and water also made the transmission of disease extremely easy.

Likewise, there was an incredible amount of infant deaths. Products for infants were horrible and made so poorly that it would be a home for varying bacteria. Young babies would also eat the chipped wallpaper and would die from ingesting the poison. Dr. Lipscomb interviews Dr. Matthew Aversion, who is a microbiologist. He spoke about the early baby bottles that were created and killed many children. Dr. Aversion states "this bend on the side of it, it's very difficult to actually clean away any residue"(Aversion). This bottle was incredibly hard to clean and had no possible way for the mother to be able to clean it. The opening was small and was barely cleaned. There was also a cork attached to the bottle for the baby to drink from. Dr. Aversion describes the spout as "The stopper being made of rubber and the tube in there, all porous materials accumulate residue of milk and any bacteria"(Aversion). This would allow the bacteria to spread to the babies hands, mouth, and throat because the spout had so much bacteria in it. Also, the rise of formula was beginning to grow as society was trying to get mothers to not directly breastfeed their babies and instead use a pump. This push sent many babies to an unnecessary death.

Also, when conducting my research I stumbled upon a phrase that was commonly used, which is "memento moris," this innocent sounding phrase reminded Victorian people of the prominent presence that death had in their lives. I have seen this phrase written on photographs that I have seen when reading through the articles and found it interesting. So, Victorian people became creative when it came to how they wanted to

remember loved ones. Makenna Johnston states, “The dead were carefully posed to appear as if they were still alive. Some deceased were propped against stands or furniture while others were surrounded by their family members or favorite toys”(Johnston). One of the key tactics that Victorian Death photographers had was to have the subject stand in a manner that led them to look life-like. If you saw a picture of someone standing by themselves, you would probably think that they were just posing for a photo. Though in this time the subject would be attached to a pole to keep them upright, or they would be held up by family members to mimic liveliness. Also, Melissa DeVelvis, who is a professor of history at the University of South Carolina describes why some subjects would be photographed in a manner that made it seem like the subjects were sleeping. DeVelvis states, “the majority of subjects are depicted as if asleep. This removes much of the difficulty for the photographer—he does not have to pose the deceased or paint the eyes open during development”(DeVelvis). Many Victorian photographs that I saw had the deceased laying in bed, coffins, or even infants in bassinets. This helped the family of the deceased to allow the subject to be seen as if they were peacefully sleeping and to show what the Victorians considered the eternal slumber.

On the other hand, the use of remembering a family member through jewelry and other objects were created to mourn a loved one. Death for the Victorians was something that was sudden, but Victorians never stopped remembering and mourning loved ones. Marilyn Mendoza, author of “We Do Not Die Alone: Jesus Is Coming to Get Me in a White Pickup” and clinical instructor states, “rings, broaches, and lockets were often made from the hair of the deceased”(Mendoza). These intimate objects were often worn by mourning widows and other women, who were mourning over a deceased family member. Also, brooches were made out of the finest material such as lavish stones and metals and would include locks of braided hair. Brooches also had mini portraits of the deceased, or a close up of a single eye. I have also seen pictures of Queen Victoria with a bracelet with Prince Albert’s portrait and Dr. Mendoza states “It is said that Queen Victoria started this trend by always wearing a locket of Prince Albert’s hair”(Mendoza). Queen Victoria loved Prince Albert so much that she never let his presence vanish from her mind and even though she went into seclusion, the nation never forgot about Prince Albert, or Queen Victoria.

Therefore, What did the mourning jewelry truly represent for the Victorian people? Unlike brooches, rings were able to be made cheaper and so it was available for the rich and poor. So, mourning rings were quite common to wear when a person passed away. Laura Ochoa Rincon, an intern at Marie Zimmerman Foundation, states that “The Mourning rings were a symbol of sadness. It represented “loss”. Hence, they weren’t supposed to be fancy at all. They were decorated with symbols such as the weeping willow, broken columns and other classical figures”(Ochoa Rincon). These rings could also be customizable with either an inscription, or a tiny image would be painted on the ring. It is interesting how Queen Victoria led a nation through grief and made such a great impact on how people came to mourn loved ones. Mourning jewelry is such a deep concept due to the love and sympathy that people felt for their deceased family members. DeVelvis truly captures the meaning of these loving objects by stating “Many carried their loved ones’ locks of hair, and even more had this hair made into jewelry or woven with other strands to make a family hair wreath. This was considered “sentimental jewelry,” with the understanding that they could keep a concrete, physical, and timeless piece of their loved one with them even after death”(DeVelvis). Even though death is permanent, I feel that seeing this new perspective of how Victorian people viewed death is less than morbid. I feel that jewelry is a timeless artifact that helps people to articulate how they wish to remember their loved one. Even though someone is gone physically, it does not mean that they cannot be with you until you yourself pass on. This is what the jewelry was for the Victorian people: a permanent reminder that their loved ones are not truly gone.

Hence, when a Victorian person passed, the period of mourning had three levels that the family members went through, especially the woman of the family. During this time social isolation was normal for the mourning and was a primary part of these levels of mourning. Queen Victoria herself went into a prolonged isolation and disappeared from the public eye. Vaijayanti Joshi, a writer for the site About Victorian-Era, speaks about the first level as they state, “The mourning can be classified into three stages, namely, Full mourning, Second mourning and half mourning”(Joshi). Particularly widows would go into full mourning, which would include an outfit that was completely black, a matching black veil, and there would be a long period of not exiting the house. This would go on for a year until widows were allowed to leave the house and change up their outfit. Next, we have the “second mourning,” this period of time would last about nine months. It is crazy to see how the mourning period was about two years and how there was strict protocol. It is interesting to see how widows would be pushed into these certain habits to show their devotion and grief for the deceased. Joshi also explains that during the second mourning widows would “Second mourning was of nine months and the veil was lifted and worn back over the head. The widow could wear minor jewelry”(Joshi). It is interesting to see the transition that the widow would go through as the first period they would be completely bland. These women would become nothing but a shadow of their grief and even the veil would aid in making them completely disappear. So, as the time goes on the widow’s mourning period would begin to shorten and the women would be allowed to show their faces again. As time would go on the grief and sadness would begin to thaw and the widows would start to live their lives again. Finally, the final cycle would complete with half-mourning as this time period was only three months long and “the widow was allowed to wear some color fabrics like grey, purple”(Joshi, 8). Even though during this time period widows could wear colors, Queen Victoria wore black until she passed away. Even though widows could wear colors they were still dark and non-colorful. The Victorians always kept in mind what they should wear, how long they should mourn, and the strict rules that widows (and women) of the house had to follow.

In conclusion, it is incredible to see how Queen Victoria started the Victorian death photography movement and how society understood death at the time. Mourning death was only for the wealthy, but with the creation of the daguerreotype camera, everyone was able to keep their deceased ones close to their hearts. In today's world, we do not have to worry about dying from diseases like cholera, or typhoid and our quality of life has improved. Though Victorians died from anything and everything. The new wave of Victorian mourning practices allowed society to cope with such rapid deaths, especially those of infants. Jewelry and photographs were the big craze to remember loved ones and were available to both classes. It is interesting to see how society has changed from the Victorian era as we no longer see death as something that is going to take us at any moment. We have science and sanitation rules that help us to stay healthy. Lastly, when Queen Victoria passed away in “1901”(Royal Museum Greenwich), with her last breath came the end of an era, and the extinction of her grand influence on society.

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TAYLER WILBER

“LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET: THE MADWOMAN BARBIE DOLL OF THE VICTORIAN ERA”

written for my Victorian Literature course

The Victorian era is often perceived as a time of strict social norms and moral strictures, where appearances and social ranks held great significance. Lady Audley, the central character in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensational novel *Lady Audley's Secret*, embodies the absurd nature of Victorian societal expectations. On the surface, Lady Audley appears to be the epitome of the ideal Victorian woman, resembling a pristine Barbie doll. However, beneath this facade lies a deceitful complexity, as Lady Audley is revealed to be a bigamist, murderess, and madwoman. By analyzing the societal expectations imposed upon women and Lady Audley's deepest desires, we can understand how her outward beauty masked her inner turmoil and how her character reflects the anxieties surrounding Victorian culture.

Victorian society had many unruly expectations for women; standards were set for women's behavior, appearance, and overall conduct, enforcing traditional and conservative values that shaped women's daily lives. One of the most prominent expectations for women in Victorian society was the concept of "The Angel in the House," popularized in a poem by Coventry Patmore. This idealized image depicted women as pure, submissive, and self-sacrificing, focusing solely on their roles as wives and mothers. The verse reads, "She loves with love that cannot tire;" (Patmore, 1854). From the novel's opening pages, Lady Audley seems to be this "Angel in the House." She embodies the qualities of compliance and submissiveness expected of Victorian women. She is portrayed as a gentle and nurturing figure, devoted to her preferred husband, Sir Michael Audley, and her stepdaughter, Alicia Audley.

Women were expected to maintain an air of innocence and obedience, and their primary role was to create a harmonious and nurturing home for their families. Additionally, Victorian society strongly emphasized women's physical appearance. Lady Audley is described in terms that highlight her physical beauty and allure; she is depicted as a vision of perfection, with delicate features, golden hair, and a child-like smile that captivates all who gaze upon her. The novel reads, "She looked very pretty and innocent, seated behind the graceful group of delicate opal china and glittering silver. Surely, a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea. The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her every movement, a witchery to her every glance" (Braddon 382). This idealized image of femininity reflects the Victorian era's emphasis on a woman's physical appearance and how it defined her worth and value in society. As the quote mentions, a girl with looks and poise, such as Lady Audley, could do no wrong. However, this idealized portrayal of femininity is disrupted when it is revealed that Lady Audley is capable of manipulation, bigamy, and even murder to protect her self-interests.

Lady Audley's beauty is not just a superficial attribute but a tool she uses to manipulate those around her and maintain her social standing. Take her husband, Sir Michael, for example; her beauty constantly entrances Sir Michael, who is blind to her deceitful nature. Lady Audley manipulates him by using her looks to distract him from her suspicious behavior and maintain her role as the perfect wife. Her beauty also serves as a means of gaining social status and financial security. Since she grew up in poverty, Lady Audley is exceptionally concerned with elevating her social and economic status. Scheming for the life she believes she deserves, she marries her first husband, George Talboys, because he comes from a wealthy family. After George abandons Lady Audley, she takes matters into her own hands and once again marries for money, this time under a completely different persona. At the novel's beginning, Mrs. Dawson states, "You know that nobody asks you to marry Sir Michael unless you wish. Of course it would be a magnificent match; he has a splendid income, and is one of the most generous of men. Your position would be very high, and you would be enabled to do a great deal of good; but, as I said before, you must be entirely guided by your own feelings," (Braddon 16). Lady Audley's desire for wealth and a life of high-class social standings drove her, so she took matters into her own hands to achieve the lifestyle she desperately wanted. She will become known as Lucy Graham, a single, penniless governess fond of Sir Michael. Lady Audley uses her beauty and charisma to seduce Sir Michael and manipulate him into marrying her, thus securing her place in society and a life of luxury.

During the Victorian era, marriage was considered sacred and the cornerstone of society. Women were expected to adhere to strict moral codes and fulfill their domestic duties as wives and mothers. It was believed that marriage, rightly understood, is an estate of captivity. The woman sacrifices herself and her desires to her husband. The revelation of bigamy, which involves the act of marrying someone while already being legally married to another person, was scandalous and was often viewed as a severe breach of societal norms. Lady Audley's portrayal of a bigamist exposes the disparity between societal expectations and the reality of women's lives. While George leaves her, she is still married to the man, and even though she goes under a different alias, she is not a new person; marrying Sir Michael under the name of Lucy Graham would still be a crime. Her desire for social advancement and financial security influences her decision to engage in bigamy. She is driven by her ambition to escape poverty and gain access to the privileges of the upper class. Her decision to marry Sir Michael while still legally married to George Talboys reflects her cunning and manipulative nature, as she is willing to deceive and betray others in pursuit of her selfish desires.

Lady Audley's crimes raise questions about the moral boundaries of human behavior and the lengths individuals will go to achieve their goals. Women revolting against this ideology were either feared or mocked. In the novel, a young philosopher argues, "The Eastern potentate who declared that women were at the bottom of all mischief, should have gone a little further and seen why it is so... They are Semiramides, and Cleopatras, and Joans of Arc, Queen Elizabeths, and Catharines the Second, and they riot in battle, and murder, and clamor and desperation" (Braddon 357).

Her revelations challenge the prevailing notion that marriage is a sanctified institution, emphasizing the hypocrisy embedded in the societal structure. The consequences of bigamy, such as prison time, fines, and public shaming, were severe, as they disrupted the lives of the individuals involved and threatened the stability of the social order. The fear of moral decay resulting from such transgressions underscores Victorian anxieties about the fragility of their carefully constructed social order.

As we learn, Lady Audley is guilty of not just bigamy but also personation and murder. Lady Audley, a/k/a Helen Talboys, a/k/a Lucy Graham, a/k/a Helen née Maldon, a/k/a Madam Taylor, was a secretive woman with many crimes to her name, which no one would have expected from such a dainty and delicate woman. Audley's revelations challenge the traditional expectations of women as morally virtuous and upright and highlight femininity's complexities and contradictions. The novel is deeply concerned with madness, as several characters are accused of being mad. For example, Lady Audley's mother is considered mad after her birth due to what modern medicine would determine as severe postpartum depression. Lady Audley herself confesses that the "unwomanly" actions such as murder, arson, and bigamy were brought on by insanity. She believes that her insanity was a trait that came from her childhood trauma revolving around her mother, as well as the fact that she was abandoned to be a single mother in poverty by her husband, George. She is then placed in an asylum in Belgium until her wits end.

It is clear that Lady Audley's psychological state is anything but one of a perfect wife, and the novel makes this a theme, stating, "Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs; terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done... I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty" (Braddon 247). On the outside, she is a shining example of what a woman in the Victorian era should be. Still, on the inside, she is riddled with secrets, multiple personas, psychological disparities, and heinous crimes weighing in her mind.

As the narrative continues to unfold, Lady Audley's involvement in attempted murder adds another layer to the anxieties surrounding women's behavior. The idea of a woman committing a heinous crime disrupts the Victorian notion of women as passive, nurturing figures. Lady Audley's actions challenge the perceived moral superiority of women, forcing society to confront the darker, repressed aspects of female nature. The attempted murder of George Talboys by Lady Audley catalyzes the unraveling of secrets and lies that linger within the story. This act reflects the moral ambiguity of the characters and highlights the themes of power, greed, and manipulation throughout the novel. The crime propels the plot, reveals the true nature of Lady Audley's character, and reveals the psychological motivations behind her actions. Lady Audley feels betrayed by George, as he leaves her alone to raise a child with nothing to her name. This enrages her and leads her to attempt and eventually admit guilt to his "murder." The novel reads,

"Yes, a madwoman. When you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD! because my intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity; because when George Talboys goaded me, as you have goaded me; and reproached me, and threatened me; my mind, never properly balanced, utterly lost its balance; and I was mad!" (Braddon 593).

Lady Audley's involvement in murder further underscores Victorian anxieties about women's behavior, no matter the fact that Audley was suffering mentally and was treated poorly. The act of murder, traditionally associated with malice and aggression, challenges the prescribed roles of women as passive and nurturing. Her actions unveil a darker aspect of female nature that contradicts the idealized image of Victorian womanhood and society's desired mental state.

Lady Audley's Secret provides a nuanced exploration of the Victorian standards surrounding women's behavior through the character of Lady Audley. Her outward appearance as a beautiful and idealized woman contrasts sharply with her hidden reality as a bigamist, murderess, and madwoman, reflecting the societal expectations placed upon women during the era. By examining the limitations imposed on women, their restricted roles within society, and the double standards prevalent at the time, we gain insights into how these factors influenced Lady Audley's choices. Moreover, this novel offers an opportunity to reflect on the broader implications for women in Victorian society who were forced to conform to societal norms while grappling with their desires, ambitions, and struggles.

Works Cited

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