

Morpheus Literary Magazine

Heidelberg
University



Fall Semester 2015



Table of Contents

3	Staff, Note from the Editor
4-5	Contest Winners A-Z
Poetry	6-13
7	All Rings Dryly by Megan Cook
8	The Result by Alexandria Wick
9	Life is a Journey by Enya Granados
10	Blanket by Rachel Peters
11-12	Tempest by Rachel Peters
Short Stories	13-34
14-23	My Dearest by Victoria Young
24-29	Chapter I by Michael Rizzi
30-34	A Beautiful Fool by Brooklyn Scott
Essays	35-52
36-41	“The Cage Remains Forever Empty”: Statements on Gender Issues in Kate Chopin’s Stories by Rachel Peters
42-52	The Multi-Faceted Role of Art in <i>Aurora Leigh</i> and <i>To The Lighthouse</i> by Rachel Peters

Morpheus



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A Note from the Editor

Hello!

The Morpheus Literary Magazine is a student-run organization through the English Department, which is working to create a writing community on campus for any and all interested. We meet on a weekly basis to work on the bi-annual publication, as well as host workshops to work on individual pieces.

Morpheus would just like to extend a large “Thank you!” to all of the students who entered this semester’s Writing Contest. It takes a great deal of work to simply write a piece, and a great deal more to send it to someone specifically to critique. We’ve really enjoyed the interest we have received through this, and we hope that you will continue to look for us around campus.



Contest Winners A-Z

Megan Cook - First Place in Poetry

Megan is a sophomore double majoring in AYA Language Arts Education and English Writing. She is a PACE tutoring coach, a staff writer of the Kilikik, and a sister of Delta Sigma Chi. Megan wrote “All Rings Dryly” on April 16, 2012 during her sophomore year of high school.

Enya Granados - Third Place in Poetry

I grew up in the difficult situation of my parent’s divorce and after seeing how they treated each other as well as my siblings and I, I have learned to be resilient, patient, understanding, and forgiving. I have since learned to always look forward and not dwell in the past. The mountains symbolize all of the obstacles that I have had to overcome in my life, and I use that stanza to show my resiliency. The third stanza encapsulates my love for music. I have always played the violin, and now have picked up the guitar and sing in the choir here at Heidelberg. It has been a calming stimulus for me during my trials. The last lines are my favorite because they intertwine with my philosophy in life so well. I am such a relational person who gains energy from meeting with others and dwelling in my relationships that are constantly growing and changing with each new and old encounter. I am glad that Heidelberg has been a place where I have been able to have all of these self reflections. Thank you ‘Berg!

Rachel Peters - First and Second Place in Essays, Third Place in Poetry

Rachel Peters is a second year commuter from Clyde, Ohio. She is double majoring in English Writing and Adolescent/Young Adult Education with a concentration in language arts. This is her first semester as a Morpheus member. Astrologically, she is a Sagittarius, Sagittarius rising, Aries moon. She was sorted into Gryffindor and was somehow categorized as INFJ on the Myers-Briggs test each time she took it. She is obviously a bit too fascinated by personality predictors, but she’d be boring if she wasn’t so eccentric, so no one is allowed to complain.

Michael Rizzi - Second Place in Short Stories

Michael Rizzi is an upcoming author that devotes his time and effort to his work to ensure he brings the best quality and entertainment for the reader. He enjoys activities such as hiking, camping, biking, mountain biking, writing, volleyball, rock climbing, and many others.

Brooklyn Scott - Third Place in Short Stories

I am an eighteen year old freshman psychology major here at Heidelberg. I am originally from Troy, Ohio, and attended high school at Miami East. This story was originally a project for my 11th grade English class. I felt that Daisy’s character was grossly neglected by Fitzgerald, and held a lot of potential for an interesting character, so I decided to make her a little bit of her



own story.

Alexandria Wick - Second Place in Poetry

Writing has always been a passion of mine; I enjoy poetry and fiction writing the most. Along with writing I also enjoy softball and painting. My piece “The Result” is a representation of what most of us can relate to, hiding behind a wall and just trying to fit in. Yet, just like any poem it can be interpreted in many ways.

Victoria Young - First Place in Short Stories

I am Victoria Young and am studying Psychology, German, and Criminal Justice. I wish to one day work as a Profiler for the FBI, or something along the lines of the television show “Criminal Minds.” I am currently a freshman and am a member of the Heidelberg Dance Team. The inspiration for my short story came from a post on Pinterest that talked about someone writing a story in which the main character fell in love with the reader. I loved the idea and went with it, looking up and reading many different tips for writing in second person and about falling in love.



Poetry



All Rings Dryly // Megan Cook

I see
Sodden tusks of elephants,
Arms of trees like veins against the sky,

Yet all rings dryly
Like the taste upon a serpent's tongue.

Grains of sand eat away
Beneath fingernails,
Between the scales of dried, cracking fish
Who are unable to decay.

Yet I see
Damp, vulgar pools of wine,
Saturated lust,
Desperation for the taste of rich grapes.

But all rings dryly
As bones protrude skin as a final surrender
To the persistence of drought;
The sun can watch no longer.

Yet I see
Soiled feathers upon eagles,

Deluxe blossoms who
Seldom do bloom.



The Result // Alexandria Wick

She puts on her face to attempt the beauty
Straightens her hair to stop attention
Going through the halls
Flashing back
Just another day acting all fake
In her mind she cannot shake
Those undweling times
She hated to leave
She goes home and takes a shower
Singing the same songs until memories take over
She can't let go- But why would she try
All she is living is a complete lie
Her emotions overthrow her
They wipe away her face
Away her mask
She does not like what shes become
So there she goes again
Like it was paper
Like it was nothing attached to her

Life is a Journey // Enya Granados

When I drive, every bridge is* a stepping stone,
taking me into the next stop of my life.
Waving farewell to the past,
speeding into uncertainty, the future.
The horizon in front of me,
gets closer and more beautiful
as more miles disappear in the rearview mirror.
When I run, every hill is a mountain,
an obstacle to overcome,
an opportunity to become stronger.
At the top, I am powerful and surge forward
to run through life with patient endurance.
When I sing, every note is a part of a melody,
taking me on a journey to a new movement.
The crescendos
and decrescendos
make life full and shaped.
My heart makes music inside me,
sending beats of love and forgiveness.
Life is a journey written down,
beginning and ending with constant farewell's,
our chapters intertwined with our hello's.

*The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems (Graywolf Press, 1998).



Blanket // Rachel Peters

You found me in the forest of time and space
Where I have wandered like a slug,
Barely able to move after seeing his face.

You threw down a ladder from another world
And I climbed into the kaleidoscopic whirl –
Up, away from landscapes cold and grey
And into an atmosphere of pink and cerulean rays.

You are a blanket wrapped around my spirit,
And when I need your music most,
That's when I hear it.

Sometimes I lie down and hold you closer still,
But sometimes I dance with your magic inside.
Together we breathe, together we hunt and kill
All that was long since buried alive.

We place our fingers over the trigger, colors all around –
I release dopamine like a happy heroin addict
And can finally bear to leave this mattress.

I will not go back, will not let go of my blanket.
The sound is everything and nothing, fantasy and reality
And it crashes into my body and numbs me
As I take in the misty scenery.

But tell me, where are we?
Are we flying skyward, until this blue dome turns black,
Or are we plunging deeper into the sea?

I may never know; you may never tell me.
But the monsters let me be.

Tempest // Rachel Peters

I feel my fire triplicity like a living flame.
You shut me out, I scream your name.
I hear their warning in the wind
But I extend my hand so we may begin.


You gaze at me with sleepy eyes
Full of marijuana dreams and sweet lies.
I look ahead into the night
As you touch my cheek and pick your fight.

You cut my flesh with knives
And I know it hurts you to see.
I know she destroyed pieces of your soul
Before you came to me.

We're a broken bunch, our scars run deep –
Deeper than even our art can seep.
But we each hold a weapon in this raging tempest
And revise the Rule of Three.

I deflect every blow with my best shield
But I can't win unless you yield.
We both grow tired, bloody, and sick.
We must stop – we've plenty of wounds to lick.

Sylvia might have called you a Nazi,
But we all know that's not true.
Only one thing remains certain:
I'll think every artist is you. *



So take your knife out of my soul
And I'll take mine out of yours.
The clouds will part, the wind will cease,
September will come chill the heat.

Our weapons will hit the ground,
Our blood will stain the grass,
The thunder will roll away,
And we will bid farewell at last.

Time heals all as long as we let it
And we will each roam the green Earth forgiven.
We walk the same plane, yet we are apart –
Until Fate deems differently and once again we start.

*This stanza alludes to Sylvia Plath's "Daddy"

Short Stories





My Dearest // Victoria Young

You pick me up. Your hands are soft, gentle, but I can feel a slight force behind your fingers as you try to keep me from falling. I can feel your pulse through your fingers. Excitement rushes through my body. That twinge of nervousness emerges again as I realize there's another person to whom I can tell my story. Each one helps me cope in new ways. Retelling my trauma cleanses my soul in ways I never thought possible.

I guess I should start from the beginning. That's what we have to do when we have to cope with a difficult situation. You start from the first moment you notice something is wrong and then work through the retelling of your trauma and its aftermath. The aftermath is pretty easy to guess: my brain becomes an abyss of information, lost in acute stress disorder, which, after six months, is diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For those who don't know what that feels like, it goes something like this: information comes in, emotions are swallowed and pressed farther into the deep caverns in my brain, responses are reticent and always win the Hide and Seek championships of my brain. This is not a story about loss, it's a survivor story. How one girl can survive the darkest moment of her life and not be buried by it. How one girl can escape the cold, clammy clutches of depression and defeat the shadows hovering around me, threatening to suffocate me.

You roll your dark brown eyes. Wow, please do that again. Your eyes are deep. I

want to compare your eyes to mud...oh that's not a good analogy. Oh dear, are you going to hate me now for saying that? Oh no...you're looking away. I can't see what you see, but please look back. I want to jump or scream, but sadly I am trapped within these pages.... okay, your brown eyes drift back onto my pages. They squint slightly as they shift left to right slowly. A small smile breaks across your face. First the left corner of your mouth rises slightly before the right corner follows. Your pale pink lips part slightly, then more revealing your bright white teeth. I can only see the first six teeth in your top row of teeth, as your bottom lip hides the others. Your brown eyes squint slightly, and I see the lines form around the corners of your eyes. Now, your two front teeth bit down on your bottom lip and your eyes drop a little from the page. Pink slowly creeps into your cheeks.

I apologize if I have made you uncomfortable. I apologize because you came here for a story, and again, I apologize because that story evaporated from my brain the moment your eyes settled on mine. I know that sounds cliché, but sometimes clichés are the only way to describe something in a way that everyone will understand. This is the first time I've actually noticed my listener. I guess I have seen them, but you are the first one to make an impact. Never before has someone so attractive picked me up, so I'm not really sure what the protocol is here...

May I know your name? You're going to learn all about me soon enough, but

I would like to know your name. You glance around the room for a moment as you contemplate my offer. You are reluctant because you don't want to appear as though you're talking to yourself. I hold my breath. Finally, it comes in a quiet whisper once you finish glancing around the bookstore:

"Tristan," you whisper. Your voice sounds nice. It's not too masculine and not too feminine. Your voice is a whisper and comes out slightly rough. Your lips barely moved when you whispered your name. Your lower jaw drops slightly on the last syllable of your name. My breath releases in a rush.

Your eyes leave the pages for a moment. You start laughing. I can't make out what caused you to laugh. Your laughter comes out in short, quiet bursts. At first it starts deep, almost like you're coughing, then it turns warmer. Your pitch rises to an almost feminine sound. Someone around you snorts, and your laughter crescendos to an almost cackle. A smile passes across my face. I wish I could see more, but I can only see what's directly in front of me, and right now, it's just the table because you flipped me over.

At some point, the laughter halts. The sounds are muffled, but I hear you say, "Yea, I'm gonna buy it. It's pretty interesting so far...definitely different from everything I've ever read."


My heart rises. I'm going home with you! You flip me, so I'm facing you again. Your brown eyes scan everything you've missed. Your eyes pass by quickly, almost like you're scanning and not actually reading. It's acceptable because you're paying attention to

me. Most people don't. I get passed between people, but no one ever keeps me. You're keeping me. You're taking me home with you. You're not just looking at my rear and determining if you like what that says about me. My front is pretty, which attracts people, but they flip me over for a moment then shelf me again...

Wait, why is the world dark again? No...no...no...no...Tristan, I thought you were different! I thought you were going to take me! Okay...calm down...calm down...deep breaths... Okay, we're in a book store, so there are two things you could be doing: putting me back or taking me to the register to buy me. I guess you could be walking out of the store with me. Stealing me, Tristan how romantic...

Ouch...that really hurt. Did you need to drop me so hard? The marble is hard against my outerwear. The back of my skull throbs in harmony with my shoulders, back, and butt. I think the back of my head hurts more; it stands out more, skewing the blend of pain signals. I know I look hard on the outside, but I'm really a big softie. Just my outsides are hard, but I wear a jacket too...I guess that's why I look soft on the outside too. Just please be gentle, Tristan.

I feel pressure under my back as I am lifted. My lips part in a big smile, showing all my teeth. You're not looking. You can't see me, but that's okay because my excitement might frighten you. This is new to me. I've always told my story when someone asked me to by picking me up. The person who bought me just listened to what I had to say.



Sometimes they cried; someone laughed once, but that person was probably the next Jeffery Dahmer or Ted Bundy anyway, so I guess nothing else could have been expected. I've never forgotten my story before. I always start off my saying the same words and end with the same phrase, just like I was told. The script of my story suddenly disappeared, like I never memorized every word in it.

Cold air blows gently across my skin as I now see light. Your face, half masked by a black and gray striped scarf, appears. I stare into your eyes, getting lost in the deep brown. One hand drops from my spine. I hear the jingle of keys in your other hand. The hand that still rests on my spine is cold, sending a shiver down it. I tug my jacket. I wish to be ensconced in something warm: a fuzzy blanket, one of those giant plush comforters you think you always have tucked into the corners of your bed (but it always ends up in a giant ball in the middle of the bed by the morning), you.

Your face reddens. Oh dear, what have I done? I'm so sorry again. I don't know what came over me because that was forward and very unnatural. I usually just tell my story to whomever, but for some reason I decided to pay attention to my listener and now...well my story is different. This reading experience is different for you than it was for anyone else. I stare at your face harder, twirling the ends of my light brown hair around my pointer finger. Maybe the wind caused your face to redden. Dammit, I really need more tact because I don't want to scare you away. You might close me forever and put me on a shelf

with all the other people you didn't like. I bite my lip, waiting for you to say something. I start laughing. Tears pool in my eyes as I think how dumb that hope is. You're not going to talk to me. I mean you did once before, but maybe you were talking to someone else.

"We're going home," you say. My heart leaps. Are you talking to me? Tristan...hey look down here! You don't. You keep your eyes trained on the road. For some reason you left me open. Maybe as soon as we get to your home you will immediately pick me up again and you didn't want to waste time opening the covers to find me again.

The car rumbles. Tristan, I hope you know your car makes too many abnormal noises, and I'm pretty sure that's not healthy. You should really get that looked at....you're still not talking to me. I hate silences. I really do. Your hand leaves the dark grey steering wheel and fumbles somewhere outside of my vantage point. Music floods the car, and your hand returns to the bottom of the steering wheel. Apparently you know the song because you start belting the lyrics in unison with the artist. Unison would be the wrong word, since you are off-key.

The song ends, and you start flipping through the radio stations. I think this is the radio, but every song that plays seems to be the opening measure of a new song. Maybe it's on your phone. Tristan, are you using your phone while driving? Do you know how dangerous that is? You're going to kill both of us! Dammit Tristan!

"Serenity, what are you doing? You've been standing there for a really long time,"

Ali calls. I turn slightly to see my best friend saunter toward me questioning my decisions. I explain to her what I've been doing. I tell her about you, Tristan. She scoffs.

"You just met him. Has he even told you anything about himself?" she asks. She flips her long curly red hair, then adjusts her cardigan, peering toward you.

I tell her you only told me your name, but I start describing your voice to her. She laughs again. I shrug and turn back to curiously watching you. Suddenly, a thought strikes me: Do you think I'm stalking you because I keep looking at you? I quickly turn to Ali, whose tilts her head when I meet her eyes.

"He's going to think I'm crazy," I say. The only emotion I can feel is nervous. Is that even an emotion? I don't even know. I think it is, but maybe I'm wrong. I'm wrong about a lot of things. Oh dear, am I wrong about this? Am I making a bad decision right now? Should I stop? Why am I asking so many questions?

"Well, first off, you are kind of crazy, but we all are. If we were all normal, we'd be a boring bunch. Our quirks are what makes us interesting. It's what makes us stand out and be remembered. Second, maybe you should change your clothes or something. A fresh outfit always puts me in a fresh mood," Ali says.

I nod and follow her. We start walking, but then we are both thrown to the ground. Ali looks at me in horror. I look up at you. You're putting the car in park. We've arrived. You put a hand around my spine again and


lift me. My heart flutters a little. Your hand is strong and slightly warmer than before.

Cold wind rips through my lightweight shirt and leggings. I think I dressed for the wrong season because short sleeves and leggings with navy blue Converse seem to be a bad idea because it's really cold, which is funny because it's summer where I live right now, and I don't like the cold. You don't like it either apparently because you're walking quickly, somewhere between a speed walker's pace and a jogger's pace. Your hand clutches me closer to your chest. It's rough and scratchy, but you're wearing a black vest over your blue plaid flannel. I can kind of see your legs, which are covered in black jeans. Your footsteps are clunky, like you're wearing boots.

I flip my light brown bangs nervously. You set me down on what I think is a counter. I hear rumbling behind me, and you still haven't flashed your eyes back to me. I wonder if you're coming back, but you would have closed me by now. I hear the click of a refrigerator. You start to walk toward me. The patter of your socks against the tile floor is barely audible. Finally, you pick me up and carry me somewhere.

It's your living room. You sit gently on the couch, careful not to drop your snacks, drink, or me. Very slowly, you recline back into the red and black plaid couch. You really like plaid, don't you? I think it's cool. I like plaid but obviously not as much as you. You sigh lightly and sip your soda.

"We're alone now, so if you want we can have a conversation. I'd like to get to



know you better, as we're going to spend a lot of time together," I say. Your mouth twitches as you contemplate my offer.

"Sure, why not? I could do a lot stranger things with my time," you quip. Now I smile.

We're actually going to do this. I'm excited and nervous at the same time. I meet many people, and no one wants to have a conversation like this. Ali still is within my peripheral vision. She looks at me inquisitively, and I give her a slight nod. She smiles and starts to walk away.

"So, what do you want to talk about?" you ask. "Also, I don't know your name."

I shrug because I was hoping you'd have something to talk about. I introduce myself: Serenity Lynne Mae Dalton. You smile and tell me your full name is Tristan Tyler Christiansen. You start telling me your favorite color (blue), your favorite sport (soccer), your favorite song ("Hello" by Adele), even though it was just released. I ask you to sing some of it, and you just laugh. It's a shy laugh, and it brings a smile to my face.

"What about you? Tell me more about yourself," you say. Your voice is low, quieter than a whisper. It's barely audible against the noises of my house. I can hear my mother walking around the house. She's probably looking for me. I've been gone for a while, but I've been talking to you.

I start to think about what I should tell you about myself. I start talking about my family. I have a younger brother. We have three dogs, all mixed breeds: a Cheagle (Chihuahua and Beagle mix) names Skye, a

Pomsky (Pomeranian and Husky mix) named Fitz, and a Dalmachshund (Dalmatian and Dachshund mix) named Ward. Ward is the youngest, then Skye, then Fitz. Fitz gets into everything. He's our little trouble maker. Ward thinks he's the house guardian, so he barks at everything and anything. Skye follows Ward around everywhere but tries to calm him down. She also likes to cuddle with everyone and is the first to lick a new guest.

You start telling me about your Golden Retriever, Buddy. I ask if you named him after those movies where the Golden Retriever plays all those sports. You laugh and seem embarrassed as you nod your head. You run your hand through your dark brown hair. The top portion of your hair is longer than the sides, so when you run your hand through your hair, the top peacocks. It looks like you tried to spike your hair but without using gel. It just stands there, defying gravity. It looks messy and starts to fall back down. You're adorable when your hair is messy...oh shoot. I keep saying stuff like that. I'm so sorry.

"You're okay. I don't mind when you say stuff like that," you say. The embarrassment evaporates from my face as I meet your eyes and see sincerity light up in them. I bit my lip and comb my fingers through my hair, prepping it for a ponytail. I feel your eyes on me as I lightly lift my hair onto the crown of my head, pulling in more pieces. I lift the elastic off my wrist and pull it around my hair. I wrap it around three times before tugging my hair to push the elastic closer to my head. My hair falls just beneath my shoulder blades now, and my bangs hang out in

front of my face, dancing in the slight breeze caused by my fan.

You start telling me that you really don't mind my company. I guess that's a compliment, but I'm not sure. You tell me it is. You say having a new person with whom to talk is good. You keep staring at me, and I'm curious as to why. Do I have something on my face? I fret for a moment, trying to figure out what's wrong, then it hits me: the only option you have is to look at me. You have to because I am in the book. Duh, wow I really hope you can like someone who doesn't notice the obvious....

After a while, you leave, promising to return. The sky darkens, slowly. It hovers between bright, blue sky with the sun shining and a pitch black moonless night. It hovers, like you're prolonging the change, as though you don't want the night to come for me. The sky turns lighter, and my heart lifts, hope rises in my chest, but then the sky turns pitch black. I sit down on a park bench...when did that appear? Has it always been there? I pull my knees to my chest and rest my chin on my knees. The fabric of my leggings is soft, but it's slightly scratchy against my smooth chin.


At some point, I rise from the bench and walk across the sidewalk in the dark. Have I always been in a park, or am I losing it? I can't remember what I'm supposed to be doing. Usually I do the same thing each time someone opens the book. I do the same thing every time, but right now I can't even remember what that is. Oh dear, you have distracted me. You have changed me. You, Tristan, have changed the course of this novel, and I'm not

sure what to do.

I finally arrive home after walking to find my front porch light lit. One of the two bulbs is out, which makes the light dimmer than usual. I push my heavy wooden door open, still lost in thought. I can't stop thinking about you. Thoughts of you dance across my mind. I am lost in the tantalizing choreography; it distracts me from reality. I'd rather continue watching your dance than focus on reality. My dogs greet me, and I play with them for a moment. Skye stands on her hind legs, begging for my attention. I kneel, and she leaps into my lap. I scoop her up, keeping one hand under her bottom as my other hand strokes her soft head. She lifts her white head and licks my face.

Days pass, but the sky remains dark. I await your return, but you don't come back for several days. I wake up every morning, expecting the sky to have lightened, but every morning, the moonless black sky remains. Why aren't you coming back? Did you actually want to hear my story? I don't even think I can tell it now because I don't want to tell you. For the first time, I don't want to tell my story to someone. I'm tired of being the helpless victim who has to turn her life around and be her own hero. I just want to live.

After several days of darkness, the sky lightens. You return, and we talk for a while. You leave again and return later. This pattern continues for days. Each time you leave, you always come back. We always catch up a little first: what we've been doing in each other's absence. I wish I could leave out me awaiting your return, but you can read my thoughts



like some kind of mind reader. I wish I could hide things from you, but I am an open book. You start asking questions again, but I'm really not in the mood. I drag my finger across my bedpost. You ask what's bothering me. I shrug.

"I wish things could be different. I really do. I wish I could really talk to you. This whole thing is crazy. I never thought the listener had any meaning to me. I'm tormented by my inability to tell my story. Who am I without my story?" I start. You cut me off. Of course, you don't want to listen to my rant about my inability to find myself. Again, you wanted a real story, not some whiny teenage girl debating who she is. I guess that was part of my initial story, but it had a point because after a tragedy, you always have to redefine your life within the parameters of your new mental stability.

"Identity is not something everyone knows or even has. You don't have to tell your story. Sure, when I heard about it, I wanted to hear it, but clearly, this is you after the tragedy, and if I were to hear what happened to you, I might not see you the way I do now," you say. This is the longest you've ever talked. You're not whispering anymore. That fear of appearing as though you're talking to yourself has dissipated. Your voice is smooth, confident. A slight rhythm presents itself in your voice, but it doesn't sound like you're singing. The ends of your sentences rise while the middle of your sentences drop slightly. I wouldn't call it a mumble because I can understand every word you say.

I feel heat rising to my face. I hope my

blushing is not obvious, but I think it is. I pause for a moment, carefully thinking over my words. This takes me a moment because the answer to my question scares me. You arch an eyebrow. For a guy you have really nice eyebrows. They're an almost perfect arch. I know you're awaiting a response. I take a deep breath and hold it for a moment before slowly exhaling.

"What...how do you see me now?" I ask tentatively. Now, you pause, carefully thinking over your words.

"I see someone I've never seen before....I mean that's obvious since we've never met, but I feel as though I actually know you. We've only spent a couple hours a day together, but I've learned more about you than I have some people at school I've known for years.... I can't actually see you, so I have to use other things to determine if I like you. Your physical appearance is useless to me because I can't see you," you explain,

I think I understand, but then the phrase "If I like you" sticks in my head. Are you debating if you actually have a crush on me? Now your cheeks redden. I ask how you determine if you like someone when you cannot actually see them. My mind is drawn to how blind people fall in love. They fall in love based on non-physical cues and like people for who they are. They can't see the masks people put on their faces to veil their true feelings. Hiding your pain within your voice is more difficult, and some people can tell when you're lying through your voice. Maybe they can hear your heartbeat of something when you lie...

I think about reading. As readers, we fall in love with someone's thoughts, words, hearts, and souls, but as people we place appearance higher when finding a mate. Some of us don't want to admit that, but every single person in a relationship finds their partner attractive in some way. We watch films because we find the actors attractive even if the plot is terrible. You're proving the point that appearance isn't as important as we think it is. You can't see me, but somehow you're slowly starting to fall in love with me. I can tell by the way you're holding me. There's a relaxation in your hands that wasn't there before. Your hands are warmer than before. I can feel water, maybe sweat, on your hands.

I stare into your eyes, knowing you can't see mine. You can only picture them and create your own image. I could describe them to you, but you will still create a different mental image that what's actually there. We start talking again. This time you go through every reason you like me. I appreciate your honesty because this is something I have never been told before. I have had lovers before, but those guys were never this honest with me. I wonder why you're this honest with me. You compliment every aspect of my personality, finishing with your desire to actually see me. You pause for a moment before speaking.


"I wish I could reach out and brush your arm. I wish I could thread your fingers through mine and walk down the street. Fall would come, and we walk down the streets, hand in hand, running through the crisp morning air to our destination, wherever that

may be...I just wish..." your voice trails off. I can hear the true desire in your voice. Listening to your craving for physical contact with me pains me. I want the *exact* same thing. I wish we could find a way to make this work, but there is a barrier between our two worlds. We each live in our own worlds, and this is the only way for us to communicate. We only have words, and they can only do so much. Touch strengthens love in ways words can't. I sigh, tears brewing in my eyes.

"Is there a way to make this work?" Your voice is small. I stand up and walk around my room. I run my fingers through my hair. I brush my hands on my dark blue jeans. I start pacing, my boots scuffing the ground as I walk. I wrap my hands around my sides. I sit back down on the wooden arm of my desk chair. I keep one hand around my side and run the other one along the scratchy microfiber fabric of the back of the chair. I think of every possible option for us, but none come immediately to mind. I see your face drop as you start to realize the truth.

"Listen, Serenity...I really like you. We've been hanging out for almost two weeks...and I...I know this may seem a little forward....too soon...but...I think...I think I'm in love with you..." you start. My face blushes. I meet your eyes, but obviously you cannot return my gaze. Sincerity and love dances in your eyes. Your bottom lip quivers uncontrollably. Again I find myself wishing to be next to you and comfort you in some way. Physical touch may be the only way for me to truly comfort you.

Your eyes widen for a moment, as



though you realized something. Your fingers flip the remaining pages, and I feel a slight breeze whip through my room. Your chest rises and halts, then you exhale. Something bothers you, and I cannot tell what. I ask you what's wrong. You hesitate.

"There's only five pages remaining..." you whisper. My heart stops. I only have five pages with you before...

"What happens...what happens when I... when I close the book...?" You ask. Tears start forming in my eyes. I feel the familiar sting of tears, and I curse myself. Crying is a terrible option, but I know why. I know what happens when you close the book.

"When you close the book..." I begin. I drew a shaky breath, feeling the tears start rolling down my cheek. I'm scared to continue. I clear my throat.

"When you close the book...I'm gone...I will forget you. I will await another person to listen to my story, and I'll tell my story that time. I still don't know why I couldn't tell you mine, but the next person will hear my story, and they will close the book too," I explain. My words are slow with small sobs starting to choke my throat.

You nod slowly, comprehending. You don't like it. Tear clouds roll over your dark brown eyes. You glance up, attempting to keep the tears from falling, but they do anyway. First, the tear rolls out of the corner of your left eye first, then your right one. Your bottom lip sucks upward into your mouth, and it quivers more. You look away from the ceiling and glare at the ground. Eventually, your eyes unfocus, tears stream freely down

your face.

My shoulders shake now as I realize what is about to come for me. I am going to lose my memory of you. I've never cared so much before if I lost my memory of a listener because you're more than just a listener. I have fallen in love with you. I understand it's really soon, but this is the most honest form of love there is. Love truly is blind. I can only fall in love with the parts I can truly see, which is really just your personality because right now, I can't be sure if I can even see or hear you. Everything is getting dark and cold right now. A sense of urgency rushes through me.

"Tristan!" I call to you. Your head perks a little. Can you actually hear me? No, I don't think you can.

"I just thought of something." My voice strengthens as I try to instill hope in you. I don't like hope because hope breeds eternal misery, but I need to be positive...I can't though. I already know I'm going to forget you.

"I may forget you when you close this book, but you can always reopen it. Sure, I might tell you the story I meant to tell you initially, but you will still be talking to me. Whenever you want to talk to me, you can just reopen the book, and I'll be there. If I can see you at all, I might fall in love with you all over again. Sure, you might repeat this experience, but maybe you won't. Isn't that what love is all about? Letting go of the one you love is the most important part of moving on. Some stories are meant to hurt us, but the ones that hurt us allow us to grow. You're

hurting now, but then the pain will pass,” I say. The words come out rushed.

You purse your lips, and your breathing becomes more labored. You squint your eyes as you try to hold back more tears. Your prop me up and draw your knees toward your chest. I flop onto the seat of my chair and pull my knees toward my chest, mirroring you. You start to open your mouth, as if you’re about to speak, but you close your mouth. You raise your eyes and look at me. Finally, you draw a breath and start to speak.

“I don’t want to start over again. This... this is what I’ve come to like. You’re going to forget me, and I’m going to be left grieving over this. You get to walk away, unharmed, and I have to....have to...” you trail off.

I understand. I don’t want to forget you, but sadly, I’m going to. I have no other choice. It’s not fair that you’re going to remember me, but I’m going to forget you. You tell me there’s only one page remaining. You lean forward and hover over the final page. Tears hit the page and drift through to me. I feel them stinging my jacket. This is strange. I never knew objects from your world could pass into mine. If you put your hand against the pages, I wonder if I could feel your hand against mine. Suddenly, as realization jolts me to my feet.

“We don’t have to end here. You could keep writing this story. *You* could keep my alive by adding on to what’s been happening. Just keep writing it. I’ll stay alive and retain my memories. Add words anywhere: the blank pages, the inside of the covers, an extra notebook, a Word Document. Tristan, you

can keep me alive and how I am now,” I say quickly, knowing I have little time remaining.

Hope enters your eyes. You slowly nod. You say you will. You say you can see the final paragraph of our story. We’re not quite there yet, but we’re nearing it. We’re almost there. I know it’s coming.

“Goodbye, Tristan...” I whisper.

Slowly, the sky darkens. I wipe my eyes quickly, hoping to appear strong for you. The last thing I hear before the sky darkens is you whisper, “Goodbye, Serenity. I...” Then deafening silence, broken only by the faint beating of my shattered heart.

Chapter I // Michael Rizzi

Adding Lib in 1865

A stress free morning of crepuscular rays beamed through every double pane window in the Baroviski house hold. Istvan cooked himself up a breakfast chorizo skillet, and golden toast with butter and cinnamon-sugar for Cassandra. The cool Atlantic breeze played a smooth medley of swishing trees and ocean waves throughout the halls against the sizzling of frying potatoes. Cassandra, dancing to Enrique Iglesias's Bailamos on the radio, prepared Istvan's belongings with only one day left before his departure for an overdue vacation. Shuffling with a groove, and jazz hands to spice up the hype, she twirled down the hallway up to her husband. Wearing nothing but a white, Egyptian cotton robe and white slippers, she kissed his scruffy cheek and danced back to his suitcase. Pouring a steaming cup of black coffee, Istvan found himself transitioning back and forth between sipping from his mug and reading his Masonic Holy Bible.

Istvan and Cassandra took an extra day off for a day of relaxation and to spend quality time together. The day started off with a walk, collecting Cut Ribbed and Ponderous Ark shells, only because the shore side had no other kinds, and a walk in the blue waves just to be cut short by Istvan being stung by a jellyfish. Irritated by the sting, he declared he wanted nothing to do with extra work for the day. Not even eating. All three meals would be sit down restaurants of different regions

of food to avoid the task of doing dishes or cooking.

Passing one o'clock, the *Debrutsid Theatre* was decided to be the next destination. The Theatre was hosting two world famous comedians. Three shows for the day; show one starting at five thirty that afternoon, each show had a duration of an hour and a half. The Theatre promised laughter by the *Dynamic Duo: Joseph Rizzi and Guytano Ferrelli* on their *Interactive Audience* tour.

Browsing the Theatre's digital, upcoming events board, Istvan expressed his thoughts on select future events. "I'm surprised the theatre was able to get such famous comedians to stop on the island. Do you think Tamás, Iain, or Aaron are going to show up for this?"

Cassandra laughed once at such a thought. "I doubt it. Tamás and Iain are at work today with other agents most likely conversing about something not work related and Aaron is with his goon's paint balling and visiting the Azores circuit to race rally cars."

"It's a shame. These guys are supposed to be two of the funniest men of the century."

"We aren't that far into the century. It's only 2016."

"Which makes sense."

"Are you excited to be flying out tomorrow?" she continued moving the conversation forward.

"I get to bond with Tamás, Aaron, and get to know Iain while walking in buildings displaying nothing but cars. We'll basically

be walking through a sea of car porn. Excited is an understatement, dear.”

The feeling of the A/C blow through the voice hole to speak to the ticket salesman promised a cooled comfort awaiting inside. They entered with a line of three hundred other audience members.

The theatre, built around the schematics of the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin, copied every inch to the last detail. All the walls, white with gold crown molding following every edge. Walkway walls and seats all a fire engine red; the first and second rounded balconies having the same design. One large, round chandelier, surrounded by more extravagant molding, lit up most of the top balcony and main floor. Smaller light fixtures brightened the first balcony and the pathways following in and out of the theatre hall.

Istvan and Cassandra entered making their way around the entire room searching to find their seats. After five minutes of utter confusion, Istvan spotted their seats, second row from the stage. Settled in comfortably, the lights dimmed away to a single spotlight on the stage.

The red curtains flew open by a yank from Guytano, which accumulated most of his introduction. The bald man, suited in black, gave a bright, boisterous smile to the crowd expressing his genuine enjoyment to have all four shows sold out.

“I wonder if we shoot a light on his head, that we could flag down a plane?!”

“Shut up,” she said hitting him yet complimenting his cruel humor.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

How are we this fine evening?” he asked addressing the crowd. Joseph walked out from the side of the stage while Guytano spoke. Joseph wore long white hair in a ponytail and dressed in a black leather jacket, an American flag bandana around his head, dark blue jeans and black boots.

“I have to say, this island is exquisite. Everywhere I go, there’s nature around me; nothing has been touched, it’s beautiful. Everything is left alone. If only our government could let us be that way.”

A couple politically influenced audience members “woo’d” him.

“Guy,” Joseph asked reprimanding him from speaking any further. “These people are here for entertainment, not bad humor.”

“Fair enough. Let’s start with a couple in the audience to come up? Let’s do a little improv. I want to see what humor our audience has.”

Cassandra’s hand reached for the sky quicker than a flash of lighting in a storm.

“Stop it Cassandra. I don’t want to go...”

“You two right here,” Guy said selecting them.

“...up on stage.”

“Come on, this’ll be fun,” she said getting up grabbing his arm, pulling him.

Guy stood next to them as Joseph spoke to the crowd.

“I am the king of entertainment and discomfort. Let’s start with costumes.”

Cassandra was more than happy to put on a triple extra-large, schoolgirl costume for the crowds entertainment as well as her

own. Istvan, however, was not as happy to be putting on the same exact costume including a stick-on handlebar mustache.

“Alright, I will be going in the back and to just a few more props that we’ll be incorporating in. Guy is going to ask the crowd for some context and we’ll figure out when we’re going to act with our volunteers.”

“Thank you Joe,” he said clasping his hands together, deciding on who he would call on. Scanning the hands of people with suggestions, he began building the setting of the first scene.

“You in the back,” pointing to a faraway audience member. “Give me a location.”

“London, England, 1865.”

“That will most certainly work,” laughing at the response. “Can I get a little background on each performer?”

Joe had returned to the stage with a closed wooden crate on a shining, red wagon.

“You seem like a fun character,” he expressed to a member in the front row dressed in vibrant, florescent colors. “What’s the lovely ladies background?”

The man listened to his friend whisper in his ear.

“That’s perfect.” He looked up at Guy awaiting for the answer. “The lady is a school teacher for the University of London and the mistress of the King.”

“I see we’re taking the outfit’s stereotypical route. How about the gentlemen?”

“King by day and drag queen by night,” yelled an audience member.

“So by day he is the king and the lady is a teacher, and at night the lady is a mistress

and our gentlemen is a drag queen?”

The crowd liberated subtle laughter.

“This is quite a scene. Glad to know our crowd has a dark sense of humor. Let’s have one more element be incorporated into the scene? Let’s ask the men up in the rafters controlling our lighting this evening. Gentlemen?”

“They have compulsive anxiety.”

“Splendid, our actors have anxiety attacks. Alright you two,” Guy condoned, signaling the scene was beginning. “Let’s set you up where you’re ending your day shift and you’re in the transition phase into the night. And action.”

Istvan stood still rejecting to take part in the foolish activity.

“Oh, my King,” Cassandra spoke, walking from his front to back, caressing his cheek with her finger. “Thou mus’ith be craving kinesthetic knowledge. Would thou consider in the enrichment of thy workings of this benign body?”

The audience was chuckling at her small gestures. Waiters and waitresses silently served the evening’s meal of boneless chicken strips with honey Dijon mustard, a baked potato, and fried pickle chips and a homemade ranch dip.

“My dear Calypso, my electrifying lust for you mus’ith be contained. A common women like thyself musn’t commit such a sin and be sentenced to eternal damnation by thou holy god. Tis not righteous.” He began to pace back and forth building up a staged attack.

“But our love cannot be contained.

Thou may be strong, but I cannot control myself.” Also taking advantage of anxiety symptoms, she began swaying forward and backward.

“The local witch crafter has a new tonic that can help your ungodly urges. It had a strange name.” He paused walking around with a thinking pose speeding up his steps. “Ahh, what the fuck did she call it?” He stopped looking up into space mocking an epiphany. “I remember now. She called it...cognac. I can’t help but go to her to suppress myself. She described it as a liquid hug and hugs help me return to my right state of mind.”

“I don’t know if I can do this my king. I cannot grade exams, share my love for you and hugs of another.”

“It’s okay my love. It’s a liquid hug. There is no human entity.”

Her faced turned horrified. “Commit adultery with you AND A GHOST?!”

The crowd laughed.

“Alright freeze,” Joe stated as they were speaking. “You’ve gone far into the night. You’ve both drank multiple doses of this tonic. Here’s two props,” he said adjusting their stage image. “And, go!”

“You know what!” Istvan said slurring and swaying with a sparling diamond tiara slanted from his scalp, crossing over his left eye, and remaining up by the end sticking in his ear. “I-I-I think all our military should use this as their uniform. I mean it’s a size or two to tight, but I can think that...that...that.....nah it doesn’t matter.”

Cassandra, with the Kings crown

around her neck and a gavel sticking out of her shirt, wondered, “What are we doing in 1865?” Cassandra questioned him while staring at his ankles.

“Eating. Remember I just had a glass of dinner with my wine.”

“Should we confess to the Flying Spaghetti Monster upon our devilish doings by eating soup and salad instead of spaghetti at dinner?”

Istvan stood still. Cassandra had thrown everyone in the room through a loop. She got down on her knees and began to worship the spaghetti monster facing Istvan. Istvan had no damn clue what to do. He just looked around thinking of a way to react.

“Okay. Freeze,” Guy said holding a blank Greek pledge paddle, a rubber chicken, and a framed picture of a graph. “Here you go you two, now we’ll join in as the local Bishop and a funeral shop owner who is in business on Christmas Eve. And go.”

Very seldom did IIA agents stay at HQ in the evening. One or two people typed on their computer finishing work while a circle of chairs inhabited by people not interested in work positioned in the middle of the cylinder room. Sitting in the ring, Tamás engaged in simple talk about rumors pertaining to the Hell’s Angels whereas Iain spoke with a man to his right on the dichotomy of good and evil.

Selective hearing derailing Iain out of his conversation, he paused his conversation to join the circle. An agent, more or less dis-respectively, refuted a statement pro-

posed by Tamás with slight hostility. Tamás broke his usual nature in conversation standing up confronting the agent.

Poorly timed, Iain's desk phone rang retracting him from witnessing an intense debate between two devoted opinions.

"Iain Webber's desk."

"Iain, I need you to come up to my office if you have a moment."

"Of course, Director. I'll be right up."

Pulling out of the circle indefinitely, Iain returned his chair to his lifeless desk. Not a single desk instrument or writing utensil occupied the space except for the computer screen, mouse, and keyboard.

Spitting out Blue Spearmint flavored gum in his trash can, he replaced them with two new pieces replenishing the flavor.

"Where the hell you goin'?" Tamás asked as Iain walked away without warning.

"Director requested me to speak with him on private matters."

Tamás acknowledged his reason to leave with a facial expression clearly stating "whatever".

"Director," he announced making his presence in the office known.

"Iain, come in, sit down. And call me Maverick. I'm your friend. I don't like my men calling me by my title. Too artificial."

Following orders, he sat down in the new red leather chairs purchased for better comfort for when visitors stayed for extended durations of time.

Shutting the door, Maverick sat back in his chair behind his desk. "I have informative news for you. It's not specific news but upon

your request after your return to the islands, I had a few investigators do some research. Your parents...they have disappeared, again."

"Where were they hiding?"

"Not so much hiding. See, although the Gulags have long since been shut down, there are a few kept secrets from the public that still exist and run. Your parents, working for the CIA, sent you to us as a favor to protect you when you were young. They sensed something was going down after hearing multiple, different rumors from multiple sources. Their operation was not compromised so to say they were caught as spies, but their work deemed them threats to whomever they were working with. They were transported to one of these non-existent facilities."

"So my biological parents are CIA operatives and are being held somewhere in a secret prison in Russia that does not exist?"

"No. Because of technology advancing and hackers becoming extremely powerful, such as the Anonymous group, Russia is not taking any chances of their plans and operations being found. They have returned to typewriters and paper. Everything they do is on file. We have an undercover agent, an invisible transmitter as we call them, who goes through government secret files. Reading through the hidden Gulag files, he came across your parent's files, at least their aliases. He knew your parents from an old job they did together years before in Guatemala so he checked in on them since he also was unofficially a part of the people who imprisoned your parents. Two years prior to your return back home, around fall of 2013,

they escaped.”

“Russia is pretty damn big. The closest countries are China, Japan, Vietnam; at least if they’re on the east side of the country near where I was, that’s where they’d flee.”

“Their escape is still not fully explained. We do know they hopped a private plane and flew to Central America where they disappeared. Because of their roles in the cartels that run down to the southern tip of Chile, we suspect they hitched a ride from fellow affiliates and were relocated. This is where we lose track of them.”

“If they work with the Cartels, what were they doing in Russia then?”

“They were after Putin. His lucky ass was only hours away from being assassinated before your parents were caught. The Pentagon tells me they worked for some Morgan Freeman dude who sent them to one of the cartels to do business in his place in previous years. The CIA won’t disclose your parents current business in Russia, but they gave us that much. We can’t find his name anywhere in the cartels and we have people everywhere in this world looking around. I have the people who I feel would be most likely to find them on the lookout and I have sent them their pictures. I felt since they are still your parents, you would want to be aware they have relocated.”

“Thank you sir. I appreciate the lengths you’re going to trying to find them to reconnect me with my family.”

“Of course. Anything to help.”

Shaking Mavericks hand, Iain exited the room to go home, leaving on a good note.

Watching Iain get into the elevator, he returned to his desk. Opening his small, deteriorating contact book of private contacts, the pages spindled to the second to last page. His finger ran down the page passing scribbled out names, updated contacts of deceased, traitors, missing, useful, useless, and continued to the last phone number of the page with only two pieces of information listed. A single phone number, and a codename.

“Needles, update me on the Webbers.”

The contact on the other end of the phone set down the phone for a moment walking away. Distant sounds of screaming came from the background before the man picked back up. “Their conditions have since worsened. Due to differentiating variables, progression patterns have significantly fallen out of sync. We’ll be running further diagnostics. Just do yourself a favor and keep Iain guessing.”

“Okay.” Hanging up the phone, looking down at James and Savannah Webbers closed profiles, he sighed in. “What did you get yourselves into?”

A Beautiful Fool // Brooklyn Scott

It was not until years after the incident, and he wrote his account of the summer's events, that I saw my darling cousin Nicky again. It took weeks of fretful apologies and pleading explanations to persuade his eyes to meet mine, and then another three months until he was willing to sit and truly listen to my words. I can understand why he had decided to hate me; I am painfully aware of my faults, and often feel the same, stomach-churning pangs of disgust. For years growing up, I watched with aversion as the people around me skated through their lives with their eyes closed, not giving a damn that their rink was constructed of other living people. They cut into the backs of those beneath their feet, never giving as much as a sympathetic flinch when the cries reached a crescendo of agony. For a long time, I believed that this insight gave me an advantage; if I could only keep my eyes open, I would never become like them: apathetic to the point of inhumanity, incapable of feeling beyond primal need and satisfaction. I honestly believed that I could be different. I had the audacity to believe that I was special, that perhaps I did not really belong among those I had known since birth. I found out later in life, of course, that I was mistaken.

I wish I were as gifted as Nick when it comes to writing; however, he is much more intelligent than I am. That is largely the reason why I invited him over when I heard he had moved into West Egg. I had hoped that perhaps I could learn something from him,

something that would propel me out of my situation.

Before I called Nick, I made absolutely sure that Jordan Baker would be at the house when I brought up the notion to Tom. Jordan was my closest acquaintance, if there is such a thing. Of all the women I have known, she was the only one who truly possessed the ability to stand. She stood on her own, with pride and dignity that invoked admiration in other women, and an odd sort of fear in men, masked by a façade vague distrust. I loved her, in a way that I still have yet to define. Her presence gave me comfort and strength, though she kept herself at an emotional distance most of the time. When she arrived that day, however, I was pleased to find that she was in a rather animated mood. I had described Nick to her over the phone, and she was eager to meet him. I insisted she stay in the front room as I talked to Tom in our room, though I wish I had not. Tom did not take kindly to the idea of Nick coming to our house. I had predicted this, but I had not predicted the magnitude to which he would oppose my request.

I had expected the “you don't have a cousin named Nick,” and the “why have I never heard of him before, then?” I expected him to be suspicious, so I brought a photo from when Nick and I were kids, hoping to quell his fears. He considered it for a moment, and grunted, seeming to accept what I said.

Tom lumbered to my bureau, and gin-

gerly scooped up my glass jewelry dish in his large hands. He delicately pulled out one of my bracelets, and twisted it in his fingers. His husky voice became a soft whisper, "I remember buying this for you. Just last month, at that little store on Twenty-Third Street. Do you remember?"

I nodded. "Yes, darling, of course I remember. It was just after we had gone to see a show."

"You were the one who had insisted we go in," he said. His muscles tensed, ever so slightly, and his posture shifted so that his hips and shoulders were squared. He turned his face back toward mine, and dread like an ocean washed over me when I saw the flames begin to spark behind his eyes. His voice dropped in pitch and temperature, his every word was calculated. "The man behind the counter smiled at you. Did you think I wouldn't notice how he looked at you?"

Pain like a fist clenched around my heart. The faster it beat out, the more it ached. "Tom," I asked gently, "what are you saying?"

"You know exactly what I'm saying," he snarled. "Who else?"

I took an instinctive step backward. "Tom, I never..."

He threw my little glass dish down. It shattered into a thousand tinkling pieces, and scattered across the floor. His face had turned a red that was nearly purple, and he began toward me with heavy steps. "Who else have you been sleeping with behind my back?"

"No one! I have never been unfaithful to you Tom!"

"You're lying to me!" he insisted, and grabbed my shoulders roughly. I tried to turn my face away, but he twisted me until I was facing him again. "Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I won't find out who he is?"

"There is *no one*, Tom!" I wriggled myself out of his grasp, and started to the door. "You are being completely unreasonable; I can't talk to you when you're like this. I'm going back to the front room."


"Daisy, don't you dare open that door," he warned. I ignored him, and reached for the handle. As I did, I heard him rush toward me. I panicked, and tried to get out before he reached me. I was nearly halfway into the hallway when he grabbed the back of my dress and pulled me back inside, slamming the door with his other hand. I stumbled over his boot, and flung my arms forward to catch myself. A crackling sound resonated through the room, and pain shot through my hand, causing me to cry out pitifully. Instantly, I knew I had broken something.

The door opened, and Jordan burst through, worry set deep in her face. "What happened? I heard shouting, is everything okay?"

Tom made a show of helping me up, brushing off my dress as if the last five minutes had never happened. He grinned in a way that would have been charming, and assured her, "Ah, yes, just a small accident. Daisy tripped."

Tears welled in my eyes, and I wiped them away quickly. "I think I...I think my pinkie is broken."

Tom seemed to hear me. He turned



his torso half towards me, his eyes skimming over my face. He mumbled, feigning interest and sympathy, then turned forward and announced to no one in particular, “I think I will head into town. Call up Nick and invite him to dinner tonight. I’ll be back before then.”

I stood still as a statue, watching Tom leave. As soon as I heard the front door blow open, his heavy footsteps clomp out, and the door slam closed, I rushed to the restroom to check on my finger in better light. It was not broken; however, it had already begun to swell up and bruise. There was not a thing I could do about that, so I did as a proper lady should. I covered my bruised pinkie up by wrapping it with gauze, fixed my make-up, and returned to entertaining my guest. Jordan and I rested on the large couch in the sitting room, spoke lifelessly of mundane things such as weather, and gossiped about the neighbors. We avoided mentioning Tom, and what had happened earlier, at all costs.

“It’s rather stuffy in here,” I complained, and draped myself dramatically over the back of the couch. “Is there nothing you can do?”

“Me?” Jordan guffawed.

I sprang to my feet, propelled by an idea that I expected to have a brilliant effect on our mood. The sitting room was made almost entirely of long windows, and had French doors on two sides. Diaphanous white lace curtains draped from just below the ceiling to brush lightly over the floor, and as I threw the windows open, the breeze wafted them through the interior of the room. Jor-

dan laughed; a deep, breathy sort of sound that was more an expulsion of air than an actual laugh. Nevertheless, I could tell by her grin that she was amused. My plan worked; the more the curtains floated over us, the livelier our conversations became. The gossamer drapes obscured our vision of the room, the outside, and occasionally our view of each other. We let our minds run unbridled, and our talk ran alongside. We giggled, we teased each other, we discussed the possibility of the supernatural because Jordan heard noises in her aunt’s house at night and feared it was haunted. We spoke like children, innocent and free, and I was the happiest I had been all week.

I wish I could say that meeting Nick again was beneficial. I would love to be able to describe just how my darling cousin swooped in and saved me from the hell I had created for myself. I would give anything to tell how he gave me advice that changed my life, pulled me out of the void of my life, and pushed me forward into a better path. Unfortunately, there are multitudes of beautiful notion unattainable to me, as happiness cannot be bought with someone else’s money.

I cannot say when Tom came home. He must have been in the stables, and met Nick outside when he arrived. I heard the slight murmur of polite conversation well before the two men entered the sitting room, where Jordan and I reclined. She must have heard them also, because she quickly gathered herself, lifted her chin, and set her face in an expression of cool indifference. I recog-

nized her countenance as the mask she wears around strange men; she always had a knack for interpreting a man's character by how he reacted to her.

I was not surprised when Tom and Nick entered the room, yet I was startled when Tom walked over to the doors and closed them, with perhaps a bit more force than was necessary. I nearly jumped to my feet, in part to embrace my cousin whom I had missed so much, partly because of the slammed doors, and also to be polite and stand to greet him. Then I reminded myself of Tom's suspicion, and that to embrace Nick would only look bad on my part.

Instead, I sat back down and extended my hand toward him. Breathless from laughing with Jordan moments before, I stuttered, "I'm p-paralyzed with happiness." I laughed at the absurdity of my own excuse for not rising to my feet, and Nick mirrored my laughter in his own, deeper voice. He walked forward and grasped my hand gently, and I whispered to him, "The woman sitting with me is Miss Baker."

He seemed to be entranced by my every word, as I was by his. We spoke of Chicago, and Nick told a wonderfully embellished tale of how the friends I had left behind yearned for me to return.

For no discernable reason, a sense of guilt dropped like a rock into my stomach. I tried to include Tom in the conversation. "Let's go back, Tom," I implored him. "Tomorrow!"

He seemed to take no notice that I had spoken at all. I was too caught in the moment

to be too distraught by this, and went on to the next subject.

"You ought to see the baby," I grinned. "I'd like to."

Suddenly, I remembered the written schedule her nanny had provided to us. "She's asleep. She is two years old. Haven't you ever seen her?"

"Never."


I began to wonder just how much of the family had actually met my little girl. I had limited contact with my side, and Tom never spoke with his. I felt a little sad that my baby had very few people around to love her, because Tom and I were certainly doing a piss-poor job as parents. I had originally insisted on the two of us raising her ourselves; I had been raised by a nanny, and hated my parents for it. I did not want my daughter to feel the same way about me. After almost leaving her in a cab and a store, and a frantic hospital visit, Tom persuaded me to let him hire a nanny to take care of her, at least for the first few years of her life. It was not as if she would remember those first few years anyway.

"Well, you ought to see her," I continued. "She's—"

Tom laid his hand on Nick's shoulder, essentially steering conversation away from the topic of our little girl. I am not sure why he did that. He asked Nick about his profession; the name of the company was long and sounded like gibberish, I do not remember it.

"Never heard of them," Tom remarked, with a smug, slightly amused smile.

Nick bristled, perceptibly offended and



annoyed at Tom's obvious sense of superiority. He responded, in a passive-aggressive tone, "You will. If you stay in the East."

I gasped and covered my mouth in equal parts disbelief and amusement. Earlier on the phone, I had told Nick of the number of times Tom and I had moved in the past, and my desire to finally settle down. I have heard very few people speak to Tom in such a tone, especially to simultaneously stand up for me.

"Oh I'll stay in the East, don't you worry," Tom assured him. Something in his voice, however, seemed off. He glanced at me quickly, then back to Nick. I could not tell what he was truly thinking. "I'd be a God Damn fool to live anywhere else."

Jordan mentioned that she could not drink, being in training and all. They spoke of Nick's house, and I began to daydream, my mind drifting out over the ocean. It only took one simple thing to bring me crashing back down into reality. A string of sounds, assembled in a way that should not make sense, but somehow does. A string of sounds, which form a name. A name I had not heard in so many years, which had the ability to make my stomach drop and my heart rise. A name that whispered promises to bring my delicately constructed life crashing down around me.

"You must know Gatsby."



Essays



“The Cage Remains Forever Empty”: Statements on Gender Issues in Kate Chopin’s Stories // Rachel Peters

Feminist literature had the potential to spur a hurricane of negative criticism during the Victorian era. In this time period, women were restricted legally and socially as they had no political voice and were expected to be chaste wives and mothers. They had very little *agency*. In other words, they had a limited amount of power to make independent decisions. However, some feminist thinkers emerged regardless, and even though they were scorned when alive, the world can look back and praise them today. Such is the case for Kate Chopin and her series of feminist works, including *The Awakening* and shorter pieces such as “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” “A Respectable Woman,” “Athénaïse,” “Elizabeth Stock’s One Story,” and “Emancipation: A Life Fable.” It took some time before the public could stomach the free-spirited Kate Chopin’s work. She made radical statements against the social norms that restricted women as they had little to do aside from being wives and mothers. Furthermore, her characters were able to display agency in sometimes scandalous ways in their struggle to express their feelings.

Some of Chopin’s characters display a mix of opinions on motherhood and wifehood, which directly clashes against Victorian expectations. This is especially apparent in Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, as she declares “I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself” (Chopin 63). In other words, she is not willing to change her

personality or make every aspect of her life revolve around her children in order to be their mother. Chopin further enforces this when noting that “Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman,” and then Chopin provides a definition for this title: “[Mother-women] were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (10). So, Edna’s husband, Léonce Pontellier, is also not the center of her life. In fact, she is unhappy in her marriage, as crying for no apparent reason was “not uncommon in her married life” (Chopin 8). She tends to not listen to Léonce either and does as she pleases, and in one example she rebels against her husband by sleeping outdoors. Chopin writes, “She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her...and freed her soul of responsibility” (43). Mrs. Sommers in “A Pair of Silk Stockings” has a comparable moment that is worded similarly: “She seemed for the time to be taking a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her of responsibility” (Chopin 241). For Chopin’s women, being wives, performing household duties are their ‘responsibilities,’ but they do not simply feel like rebelling against this standard, they *need* to, as implied by the term “impulse.”


Women in this time could not simply get a divorce to escape these responsibilities

and pressures. In “Athénaïse,” Chopin describes marriage as “a thing not by any possibility to be undone” (204). The statement is historically accurate. In 1900, the divorce rate was about 0.2 percent in the United States when less than a century later in 1990 it was about seven percent (“Population, by Marital Status, Sex, and Race: 1880–1990”). Virtually no one got divorced because people just did not understand that marriages did not always work even if abuse was absent, much like in the story “Athénaïse.” When the main character in this story describes her struggles, “her friends laughed at her,” so she leaves her husband for a period of time but technically does not divorce him (Chopin 215). In other words, no permanent arrangement is made to accommodate her even though she takes action.

However, abstaining from marriage does not necessarily save Chopin’s characters from responsibility. For example, in “Elizabeth Stock’s One Story,” the main character pays for her nephew’s education and cannot afford to tend to her own health (Chopin 251). Also, in “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” Mrs. Sommers goes on a shopping spree for herself and not her children, she “seeks merely escape from her life and from herself” but does not do anything to directly change the fact that others (such as her husband and children) will expect her to cater to their needs instead of hers (Stein 358). In other words, her shopping spree does not necessarily indicate a lifestyle change. Furthermore, Edna kills herself at the end of *The Awakening*. Altogether, Chopin’s characters often have to

deal with having to take care of others before themselves so there was virtually no acceptable or safe way out.

The women in Chopin’s stories also struggle to validate their own anti-Victorian feelings and respond accordingly. For example, Edna lives a “dual life – that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” in *The Awakening* (Chopin 18). Her actions do not match her thoughts, but since she is ‘questioning,’ she is unsure of how she feels about the world around her. Hence, finding an identity is a struggle. Peter Ramos points out that other female characters in *The Awakening* (in addition to the author herself) managed to live through expanded versions of typical Victorian-era identities that give them “a surprising amount of agency” (148). For example, “women...have, over time, and with effort, successfully modified the boundaries and definitions of the role of ‘mother’ to include someone who works both inside and outside of the home” (Ramos 148). However, Edna does not choose any identity, and this is what actually leads to her death (Ramos 147). Ramos concludes that “the problem Edna faces, the more pressing and essential issue, is not so much a matter how many available roles there are to choose from, but of how to fight for and dedicate oneself to (and then modify) any of those roles in the first place” (154). Accounts of Chopin’s personality prove his assumption to be correct; she’s described as “a devoted daughter, wife, and mother who typified the feminine virtues of the Victorian era,” yet “she also shared the strength and



independence of the controversial New Woman who strode onto the American scene in the 1890s” (Adams xvi). Therefore, Chopin chose an identity but did what she wanted with it to expand her agency. She refused to let her Victorian roles limit her.

Chopin’s characters turn to out-of-the-ordinary, immoral behavior to break free from society’s standards, but Chopin does not scold them for doing so and insinuates that they are more rational than most would expect. In fact, Adams points out that “what Chopin’s contemporaries found particularly objectionable about *The Awakening* was the author’s apparent unwillingness to condemn her protagonist’s unconventional choices” (xxvii). Chopin covers the whole spectrum of odd behavior, starting with the smaller-scale things. For example, in *The Awakening* when Edna abandons her regular duty of answering the phone, her husband remarks, “I hope you left some suitable excuse” (Chopin 68). For Léonce, it did not matter if she simply did not feel like performing a boring task. It was “her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife [that] angered him” (Chopin 76). Hence, the fact that she did not answer the phone is not as serious as the symbolism. By not answering the phone, she is stepping away from the Victorian expectations placed on women.

Such a subtle rebellion can be viewed as a warning for what large-scale, undeniably scandalous events have yet to come. Later, Edna falls in love with Robert, who sparked “an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing,” and she kisses a

man named Alcée – this particular event is described as “a flaming torch that kindled desire” (Chopin 72, 112). Not only does Chopin refuse to scold Edna in the story itself, but she likely wrote this story as a way of supporting and understanding Edna. Bert Bender insinuates this theory as he notes that Kate Chopin read Charles Darwin’s work but disagreed with its sexist aspects (459-461). Throughout *The Awakening*, “Chopin modified Darwin’s theory of sexual selection in a way that would have offended his Victorian sensibility” (Bender 462). So, Chopin exhibits understanding of Darwin’s theories, particularly that reproduction is instinctive. Darwin calls it the “most important function” instilled in people (qtd. in Bender 460). Chopin even includes genetic links. Edna inherits “some of her father’s masculine authority and passion, which plays an essential role in Chopin’s effort to validate Edna’s developing power to select” (Bender 469-470). Bender’s idea about Chopin’s inspiration is intriguing and may be crucial to understanding Chopin’s intentions. By instilling (and also modifying) Darwin’s scientific theories, she not insinuates that Edna’s feelings and actions are not malicious as Victorian society would label them, but that they are uncontrollable and *natural*.

This sympathy is evident in other stories aside from *The Awakening*. The same scenario of adultery occurs in “A Respectable Woman.” Mrs. Baroda is attracted to a man despite being married, and even though she fought temptation and managed to “draw away from him” at the beginning, she even-

tually declares “I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him” (Chopin 197-198). Her attraction, if held up to Bender’s theory, is natural, and that she was fighting instinct initially. Perhaps she overcame the fear of doing something not condoned by societal standards. In “Athénaïse,” the main character leaves her husband, Cazeau, even though he is not abusive and only returns when she realizes that she is pregnant. Chopin writes “Cazeau must know. As she thought of him, the first purely sensuous tremor of her life swept over her... She was impatient to be with him” (234). These feelings are certainly a departure from her “growing aversion” of her husband described at the beginning of the story (Chopin 204). So rather than perhaps wanting a regular family life for her child, she may have left out of some subconscious frustration that the urge to reproduce was not being fulfilled. However, once she realized it was, she felt satisfied with her partner. These characters may not have been able to help what they felt.

While Chopin did not commit adultery (that we know of), she practiced the feminist values she preached in her stories. She was characterized by “outspokenness and independence,” and after getting married, “Kate’s new relatives were scandalized by her frank manner and her habits of smoking cigarettes and strolling the city by herself” (Adams xviii). This is mirrored in Edna, who was also not completely accepted by her husband’s society throughout *The Awakening* (Chopin 12). However, “Chopin...should not be confused with her protagonist. A widow, single

mother, and professional writer, she lived her life fully and to its end” (Adams xxxvi). She was able “to see around such obstacles” that Edna faced, further enforcing that feminist women did not have to live in misery in the Victorian era (Adams xxxvi). It was not easy for women to live in a world with so many misconceptions and restrictions, especially when they realized exactly how restricted they were, but Chopin made it happen.

Reactions to her work have gone from condemnation to commendation over the past century. When *The Awakening* was first released in 1899, it did not leave a positive impression. One reviewer said that it was “not a healthy book; if it points any particular moral or teaches any lesson, the fact is not apparent...It is a morbid book” (St. Louis Globe-Democrat 291). More than likely, Victorian attitudes shaped this opinion and did not allow this person to understand why Edna was driven to commit adultery. Even those who originally praised Chopin were unhappy with *The Awakening*. A reviewer wrote “It was not necessary for a writer of so great refinement and poetic grace to enter the overworked field of sex fiction” (Times-Herald 291-292). In other words, this critic believed that Chopin degraded herself as a writer through expressing her feminist views. But the world today is so different: Women are much more liberated and people have come to understand the oppression women faced in earlier time periods. Adams describes in “Inspired by *The Awakening*” the printing pattern of the book. “After being reprinted once in 1906, it went out of print for more than

five decades...*The Awakening* resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s during the revival of the women's movement" (289). Chopin "fore-shadowed a sexual liberation that was nearly unthinkable in her own time" and now Edna can be considered "a model for strong women to emulate" (Adams 289). Considering the amount of time that had to pass before *The Awakening* could be understood, it would be fair to assert that Chopin was most prophetic.

Chopin was able to see the societal problems that afflicted women clearly, and she incorporated these issues into her work. Readers were unprepared for a revelation when they had yet to understand the problems or solutions. Her stories demonstrate that women had a difficult time expressing themselves and were confined to certain gender roles that were difficult to escape. Sometimes, women had to make their escape through scandal. The short story "Emancipation: A Life Fable" metaphorically sums up the lives of Chopin's characters succinctly: They were each "born in a cage" – a restricted world – but once these powerful women found a way out, they lived a more vivid life (Chopin 159). "The cage remains forever empty" – once they found a way to be more independent, going back to the Victorian standards was difficult, and for some, impossible (Chopin 159). Edna Pontellier never returned to her cage and neither did Chopin herself. Women's agency was unconventional during the Victorian era, but today women praise the risks Chopin and her characters took as they helped pave the way for a more accepting, feminist society.

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The Multi-Faceted Role of Art in *Aurora Leigh* and *To The Lighthouse* // Rachel Peters

Creating art can be a very solemn, personal process. While its multiple forms may differ, the internal benefits of creation leave meaningful marks on artists' emotions and levels of satisfaction no matter which specific talents are developed and used. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and novelist Virginia Woolf make note of art's impact on fictional creators through the protagonists of their respective pieces: *Aurora Leigh*, which traces the life experiences of a poet of the same name, and *To the Lighthouse*, which follows a painter named Lily Briscoe for approximately two days that are separated by ten years. Not only do these women choose different artistic mediums, but their stories take place in different times and contexts. Barrett Browning penned Aurora's story in the mid-eighteenth century and Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse* in the 1920s, but these characters' experiences with art are comparable (though certainly not identical) nonetheless. Overall, art is a dominant part of their lives as it serves as an outlet for these characters' personality types and is prominently used as a way of expressing their emotions. Furthermore, it connects Aurora and Lily with others – from other artists to the divine – and leads them to a sense of empowerment through proving their talents. Altogether, art provides them satisfaction.

Even aside from the fact that Aurora and Lily are artists, both of these characters have distinct traits that lend themselves to art as neither of them fit the Victorian cliché.

When Aurora must live with her aunt as a result of her father's death, she quickly notes that her vibrant personality clashed with that of her calm aunt: "I, alas, / A wild bird, scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage" (Browning 1.309-310). Mrs. Ramsay, an older woman who (like Aurora's aunt) holds Victorian values in high regard, observes a similar aura in Lily: "There was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own Mrs. Ramsay liked very much indeed, but no man would, she feared" (Woolf 104). These characters' liberated personalities demonstrate a similarity to studies which "explored personality traits and thinking styles and how they relate to the work of artists," as found by Mark Gridley of Heidelberg College's research, and the fact that these particular artists' personalities are similar may parallel Ashley Warner's assertion that "special thought process ... distinguish highly creative people" (247; 73). Gridley notes that artists are "less conservative than the general population" (247). Hence, Aurora and Lily's personalities lend themselves to art, and their "lack of conformity to social norms" not only may have led them down artistic paths, but opened up their minds to more experimental art (Gridley 247).

This is certainly the case for Woolf and Barrett Browning. Both authors' feminist stances are no secret, thus marking them as less conservative in regard to their beliefs, but they were also liberal with their writing. "Woolf ... rejected the traditional conventions

of fiction ... she explored the everyday, internal lives of her characters in a style – often called stream-of-consciousness – that mimics the flow of her characters’ thoughts” (Black et al. 213). Furthermore, Christine Chaney, the Chair of the Department of English at Seattle Pacific University, claims that Barrett Browning is known “for her seemingly strange – and even awkward – hybrid use of the verse-novel form” (791). However, because Barrett Browning’s style is unique she receives praise – even from Woolf, who “mocks yet ultimately applauds” her writing (Chaney 792). The authors of these pieces had characteristics that rebelled against typical Victorian expectations, and since their nonconformity led to creativity, Aurora and Lily’s personalities may also have been a natural causation of their own creativity.

For both Aurora and Lily as artists, they feel the need to describe emotions and they are able to do so through their impulse to create. In a discussion of *Aurora Leigh*, Olivia Gatti Taylor claims that “poets open themselves completely to the source of inspiration” (154). This coincides with Aurora’s beliefs about art:

Behold, at last, a book.
If life-blood’s necessary – which
it is...
If life-blood’s fertilizing, I wrung
mine
On every leaf of this. (Browning
5.352-356)

Since she notes that “life-blood’s necessary,” she indicates that a great deal of work and passion must go into art. However, Tay-

lor’s concept can be applied to Lily even though she is a painter, for Woolf describes, “Wherever she happened to be, painting, here, in the country or in London, the vision would come to her, and her eyes, half closing, sought something to base her vision on” (181). The idea that she will always be searching for “something to base her vision on,” suggests that even though Taylor argues specifically about poets, Lily is also seeking a “source of inspiration” (Woolf 181; Taylor 154). Since her eyes are “half closing,” Woolf exemplifies deep concentration, and hence, she is also ‘opening’ herself “completely to the source of inspiration” (Woolf 181; Taylor 154). Lily is certainly basing her art on her feelings, but her attention is directed to Mrs. Ramsay: Even though Mrs. Ramsay is dead when Lily is painting, to her “she seemed to be sitting beside Mrs. Ramsay on the beach” (Woolf 171). So for Lily, inspiration is primarily emotional, but it also embodies itself in a physical absence.

Lily thus relies on art as an emotional outlet which helps her attain inner stability. “A brush” is “the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos” for this artist (Woolf 150). Penelope Ingram also describes Lily’s need for stability: “Through her art, Lily expresses her desire to bring everything together and impose a sense of order on an otherwise chaotic existence ... In *To the Lighthouse* [sic] is the vehicle by which things are put together; it is the ultimate unifier capable of resolving the fractures of human life” (82). She strives for emotional balance in the process of painting, and as a

result, strives for balance in the picture itself: There was something displeasing about the placing of the ships... The disproportion there seemed to upset some harmony in her own mind. She felt an obscure distress. It was confirmed when she turned to her picture...For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary. There was something perhaps wrong with the design? (Woolf 193)

In this passage, Lily is thinking through problems within her painting as well as the somewhat hostile Mr. Ramsay's interruption, but these two issues merge since her unpleasant emotions from the encounter with Mr. Ramsay are affecting her picture. Resolving her "distress" equates to fixing the painting in this case (Woolf 193).

Since Lily paints in order to achieve emotional stability, she is benefitted mentally *and* physically. Sidney D'Mello and Caitlin Mills of the University of Notre Dame argue that "writing about difficult events can facilitate the purging of unwanted thoughts (catharsis), can leverage the stress-relieving effects of self-disclosure, can help individuals make sense about emotionally troubling events ... [and] can help individuals manage their emotions more effectively" (140-141). While writing is specifically mentioned in this assertion, if it can be applied to painting it describes art's effect on Lily perfectly as she

ponders Mrs. Ramsay's death and paints. One study by Sandra Klihr Beall and James W. Pennebaker which consisted of groups writing about unpleasant memories demonstrated that members "evidenced higher blood pressure and more negative moods" than the control group (which wrote about "trivial topics") "each day after writing the essay" (275-280). However, "subjects in the trauma-combination and trauma-emotion conditions reported reductions in health problems," thus displaying "long-term benefits" (Beall and Pennebaker 279-280). Once again, writing is the key subject of this study, but when Lily paints she is considering unpleasant events and weaving them into her art. By creating art inspired by such events she is allowing her emotions to seep into the work, and this release may be improving her health as opposed to keeping thoughts buried in her mind.

Sometimes Lily's artistic visions make her feel better without necessarily working out a clear solution, particularly during earlier reflections on the death of Mrs. Ramsay. "For days after she had heard of her death she had seen her thus, putting her wreath to her forehead and going unquestioningly with her companion, a shade across the fields. The sight, the phrase, had the power to console" (Woolf 181). Here, she is envisioning a peaceful scene of Mrs. Ramsay to ease any pain caused by her death. In this scenario as well as the moment in which Lily must deal with Mr. Ramsay's influence as she paints, Lily attempts to restore emotional equilibrium in the process. Daniela Munca argues a similar

point when noting that Lily likely takes the place of Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* while Mrs. Ramsay represents Woolf's mother, and Lily is therefore "struggling to complete a painting in which Mrs. Ramsay's absence from her familiar place is somehow the focal point, just as Woolf was struggling to achieve a resolution of her novel on the same theme" (279). Munca further explains that "[Woolf] could find peace, she could put that peace on paper as an expression of her ultimate artistic vision" (284). This assertion also sums up what Lily is trying to accomplish: Like Woolf, Lily searches for "peace," and perhaps the writers in Beall and Pennebaker's study were inadvertently searching for it without necessarily realizing it, thus contributing to their good health that seemed to result from writing about unpleasant memories (Munca 284; 279-280). Through her work of art, her personal feelings are exposed, thus coinciding with Arup Jyoti Sarma's belief that "in creating art, humans reveal themselves and not the object" (7). Lily is able to identify her feelings through the process of creation, express them accordingly, and alleviate pain as she paints.

Aurora also uses art as an emotional outlet, but unlike Lily, she uses it as a means of fostering a transcendental connection rather than as a therapeutic activity. Lily relies on art to attain emotional harmony while Aurora asserts that a distinction exists between creating art and experiencing life: "While Art / Sets action on the top of suffering: / The artist's part is to be and do" (Browning 5.364-366). She places a higher value on emotions

because she believes they are reminiscent of the divine:

Art is much, but love is more.
O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!
Art symbolises heaven,
but Love is God
And makes heaven.

(Browning 9.656-659)

Hence, she believes art is 'symbolic' but not a true experience. Art is a shadow of something bigger – love. Love makes her feel closer to God, but Aurora also insinuates that God's influence is embedded in the world around her: "Earth's crammed with heaven / And every common bush afire with God" (Browning 7.821-822). Her opinions correspond with Sarma's analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's artistic views as they focus on artistic spiritual connections, and he notes that "in their creativity and self-expression, humans become conscious of the abundance, their ability to go beyond their physical finitude and through the creation of art, strive to send their communication to the Supreme Person who reveals Himself to them" (4). So, some artists use their talent to foster a spiritual connection, and Aurora does this through experiencing emotions she associates with God (love) and creates her art based on those experiences.

Making art is an impulse for Aurora and Lily despite any doubts they have about the quality of their pieces or their longevity. Aurora often feels unsatisfied with her work.

I am sad:

I cannot thoroughly love a work
of mine,
Since none seems worthy of my
thought and hope
More highly mated. (Browning
5.409-412)

Her work is not as great as she hopes despite that readers are “praising” her poetry (Browning 5.440). Others’ opinions do not influence her beliefs. However, even though she is not always satisfied with the outcome, she insists that she is meant to write poetry because she feels that is her calling: “I, too, have my vocation - work to do, / The heavens and earth have set me” (Browning 2.454-455). This information about Aurora challenges Sonya Dal Cin, Dara Greenwood, and Christopher R. Long’s contention that “a belief in self-importance ... might ... be linked to a greater or less extent with particular appeal of fame” (490). Instead, Aurora’s feelings about art support Morris Eagle, who is associated with California Lutheran University and Adelphi University among other institutions. Eagle suggests that art has a high internal value as opposed to an external value: “It is the nature of genuine interests and creative activities that one autonomously pursues them, so to speak, for their own sake ... rather than for some purpose external to them” (22). So, Aurora critiques her work to her own standards and does not allow others’ approval influence these standards.

Lily is also intrinsically motivated to create. She is unconcerned with what others will think of or do with her art, for when she finally finishes her painting at the end of *To*

the Lighthouse, Woolf states that “it would be hung in the attics...It would be destroyed. But what did that matter?” (208). Lily accepts the fact that others may not appreciate her work and that it will disintegrate with time. Taylor notes that “a poem – once it has been produced and publicized – is cut off from the poet, gaining a life of its own” (157). The same can be said of Lily’s painting (even though it never is said to be sold or mass produced) because Lily’s belief in its inevitable deterioration insinuates that she does not have much control over its future. Borrowing Taylor’s language, Lily knows that her painting will be “cut off” from her (157). She cares more about how her art makes her feel. For example, “Lily’s thoughts turn to her art as a means of emotional survival” during a long and awkward dinner with the Ramsay family (Munca 280). Art can provide Lily with an escape from unpleasant situations or feelings in addition to being an emotional outlet as discussed earlier.

Coincidentally, the reasons these characters are creating their pieces match up to Aurora’s standards of exceptional art. Both create for themselves, and they do so honestly: Aurora writes to accurately depict experiences while Lily creates to help her realize her own emotions and alleviate negativity. Aurora calls poets “the only speakers of essential truth” and insists that “wrong thoughts make poor poems,” and these theories can be applied to Lily’s paintings as well (Browning 1.860, 5.165). Since both create based on their own feelings, they are not falsely depicting events and emotions they


have not experienced or do not understand. Some information found in a dual case study by John McCarthy of University College Cork and Paul Sullivan of the University of Bradford support that making art based on oneself results in realistic depiction: One of the participating artists “said that a ‘self-portrait’ is like taking a ‘truth-serum’ insofar as an authentic and ‘real’ self is revealed in the process of making” (245). Taylor believes that Barrett Browning’s poem is in fact “[Aurora’s] long-awaited child,” her masterpiece, and from this theory it can also be considered Aurora’s “self-portrait” due to its autobiographical nature (158; McCarthy and Sullivan 245). Furthermore, Aurora believes that a refusal of letting others’ opinions influence her work has a pleasant impact on the work of art:

And whosoever writes good poetry,
Looks just to art...
He will not suffer the best critic known
To step into his sunshine of free thought. (Browning 5.250-254).

Hence, according to this theory, ensuring that art is a personal reflection unaffected by others improves the piece itself. Lily and Aurora certainly create personal pieces since they rely on emotions, so in regard to Aurora’s beliefs, they are making exceptional art. They may not generally care about what others think, but the quality of their work may eventually come in handy when proving others wrong about their abilities as female artists.

Since Lily is ultimately painting as a

way of validating her feelings about Mrs. Ramsay’s death, she is also making truthful, and by Aurora’s standards, exceptional art. While one may argue that Lily could not possibly be able to accurately depict any emotions felt which surround an event that occurred ten years before, research suggests that this is possible. D’Mello and Mills assert that in an “autobiographical recall procedure,” “participants are asked to recall a specific memory ... and write about the memory. The idea is that this will cause participants to relive that event, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will *feel* the emotion associated with the event” (141). If this concept can be applied to painting, it explains why Lily is feeling so many intense emotions even though Mrs. Ramsay passed away several years beforehand. Consequently, her resulting piece of art may be just as accurate as if the event occurred closer in time. The fact that Lily paints instead of writes may also enable her to make her work more accurate based on her belief that language is not sufficient, which is evident when Lily reflects on the life and death of Mrs. Ramsay and wants to express her feelings to Mr. Carmichael: “One could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark...For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there?” (Woolf 178). Unlike Aurora, words do not come to Lily, images come instead. Beall and Pennebaker claim that while “a natural way of understanding traumas is by talking with others, many upsetting events cannot easily be discussed” (274). This



clarifies why Lily paints instead of writes. If drawing can be done more easily for her, it may be easier in turn to make her art more accurate to her own feelings.

Lily and Aurora's artistic expression also impacts their relationships with other people. "Research has found that daily feelings of relatedness – feeling understood and having meaningful interactions with social partners – were associated with positive mood, vitality and well-being" (Dal Cin, Greenwood, and Long 491). Lily is able to connect with Mr. Carmichel, a poet, because they share a mutual appreciation for art. Recalling Warner's theory, the two may be further connected by the "special thought processes" that "distinguish highly creative people" (73). Their bond is demonstrated when Lily is thinking of the Ramsays and painting her picture: "They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything" (Woolf 208). Not only do they share a mutual love of art, but they also understand each other's emotions and thought processes without having to ask each other to elaborate. Consequently, "when one's relational needs are met, one may be less motivated to attain extrinsic goals such as image, fame, and wealth ... which have been shown to be associated with lower levels of emotional health and well-being" (Dal Cin, Greenwood, and Long 491). So, since Lily has deep-rooted (though not romantic) relationships, her resulting contentment may be prominent enough to explain why she is able to accept the idea that her work will be

"destroyed" (Woolf 208). She does not crave acceptance through her art because she already has positive relationships with others. However, Lily is not socially high-maintenance. Experiments by Eagle in which people "were deprived of sensory stimulation for an extended period of time," led him to conclude that "the ability to tolerate the sensory deprivation situation without undue anxiety was correlated with performance on tests of creativity" (21). Lily is creative, so she may not need "sensory stimulation" (in other words, exciting conversation or other stimulating events) all the time, as long as she continues to maintain some close relationships. Hence, Lily "need not marry": She does not *constantly* need to be with another person due to her creative nature (Woolf 102).

While Aurora is indifferent to critics, her art does have an impact on her relationship with at least one person. She cannot marry her cousin Romney Leigh until he finally understands her art. Since her poetry is especially influenced by love, she searches for it not only so she can deeply connect with another person, but so her art can be more realistic: "To have our books / Appraised by love, associated with love, / While we sit loveless! is it hard, you think?" (Browning 5.473-475). Even though Aurora experiences non-romantic forms of love with her father and her friend Marian, it takes her most of Barrett Browning's epic before finding romantic love. Despite being creative, Aurora relies on relationships more than Lily since her art's primary subject matter happens to revolve around caring relationships while

Lily's art revolves around various other complex emotions.


One aspect that is dominant for Aurora and Lily is the empowerment they gain through creating art and the resulting success. While art leads them to pleasant bonds, they also receive backlash for even attempting to make art. Aurora primarily needs to prove herself as an artist to Romney, for when he discovers that she wishes to be a poet, his reaction is anything but encouraging:

'Women, are you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers,
and chaste wives,
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
We get no Christ from you, and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind.' (Browning 2.220-225)

His sexist belief that poetry is an elite masculine form prevents him from taking Aurora seriously as an artist. However, once he has read Aurora's book years later, he declares "The book is in my heart, / Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams in me: / My daily bread tastes of it" (Browning 8.265-267). Not only does Aurora write poetry, but she writes it well, thus making an empowering feminist statement for all female writers.

Lily must deal with sexist criticism from a taunting man named Charles Tansley and she must also prove herself to Mrs. Ramsay, who places Victorian values before art

and independence. Tansley has been "making it his business to tell her women can't write, women can't paint, not so much that he believed it, as that for some odd reason he wished it?" (Woolf 197). In a world coated in residual Victorian values, Tansley is likely uncomfortable when imagining whether or not women could be successful in areas that required talent aside from homemaking. Lily occasionally thinks of his sexist statements throughout the novel as they make her reconsider her artistic purpose: "Always... before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt. Why then did she do it?" (Woolf 158). Perhaps Tansley's criticism which spurred moments of reconsideration tested her feelings about art, as Munca claims about Mrs. Ramsay: "It is facing Mrs. Ramsay, a symbol of the Victorian patriarchy that strengthens [Lily's] faith in the value and power of art" (Munca 281). Through her art she is happy even though she is not married, and hence, "Lily gets free from the influence Mrs. Ramsay had upon her, an influence representing the Victorian concept of women and their role in society" (Munca 280). Art likely frees her from Tansley's influence as well because her ability to create, the living proof that women *can* paint, proves Tansley wrong. Being prompted to recall why she turns to art and creating as a way of proving everyone wrong may help her develop a sense of confidence. Considering



Aurora's artistic standards (that art must accurately depict emotions and experiences) and that Lily's work matches them as mentioned earlier, the ability not only to make art but to make exceptional art further proves Tansley wrong and likely adds to her assurance that creating art is not done in vain.

Ultimately, Lily finishes her painting, thus completing her tale. Doing so marks a great success, as Paisley Livingston of Lingnan University and Kelly Trogdon of Virginia Tech explain that "many (but not all) artists are strongly interested in the distinction between the complete and incomplete works. They report that they are trying to finish a work, for example, or proudly declare that they have done so" (225). Completion is what an artist works towards, but not every artist reaches this point. Some artists have a "disposition" which prevents them from calling their piece complete as they have "beliefs that are tied to extreme coercion, the belief that the work is hopeless and to be abandoned as incomplete" (Livingston and Trogdon 230). This does not apply to Lily: "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (Woolf 209). Since the narrator describes her as being "in extreme fatigue," she has worked rigorously on this painting (especially in terms of the emotions she felt during the process), and this detail makes the final declaration "I have had my vision" more relieving and rewarding.

At the end of *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora


discovers she has the ability to create a great piece of art, and one theory suggests that she already has. She can finally be with Romney, with whom she is in love, thus leading to these final lines: "Jasper first,' I said, / 'And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony; / The rest in order, .. last, an amethyst'" (Browning 9.962-964). Everything is "in order" since she has found love. Aurora made a statement earlier insinuating that one must experience love to accurately write about it: "To have our books / Appraised by love, associated with love, / While we sit loveless! is it hard, you think?" (Browning 5.473-475). With this in mind, when Aurora says "last, an amethyst" she is also signifying that she is now capable of making her great piece of art because she is experiencing love, and that she will now be able to accurately tell the "essential truth" straight from her point of view (Browning 9.964, 1.860). It takes the entire poem for Aurora to find love and have the ability to create something she will truly be proud of. However, Taylor asserts that "in a sense, the epic itself is her long-awaited child," or in other words, her masterpiece (158). Since Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* is narrated by Aurora herself, it may be intended to fictionally be the great piece Aurora writes after finding love. She too can "proudly declare" completion and be satisfied (Livingston and Trogdon 225).

Hence, Aurora Leigh and Lily Briscoe's creativity affects a number of aspects in both of their lives, and overall, it leads to satisfaction. Art serves as a medium for them to channel their free-spirited personalities

which could not be confined by Victorian ideals, for creative people oftentimes have “less conservative” values (Gridley 274). Art and creativity also play roles in determining these characters’ love interests (or, in Lily’s case, lack thereof): Even though both need steady relationships, Aurora’s personal (and transcendental) views indicate that romance is required to enhance her life and art, which differs from Lily as she is satisfied with non-romantic relationships. For her, art does not always need to represent love, but it does need to help her work through tough emotions. Based on Beall and Pennebaker’s study which indicated that writing about unpleasant experiences can lead to “reductions in health problems,” and Munca’s claims about finding “peace” through art, Lily is improving her physical and mental health by painting through her feelings (279; 284). Either way, both Aurora and Lily are making their art based on their own experiences and emotions, and in Aurora’s view, that makes their art superior. Not only making art, but making *good art*, helps them when creating their pieces, for even though they make it clear that they create impulsively, they are able to disprove their sexist antagonists’ views through the completion of their pieces and be further empowered by their accomplishments. For these women, art benefits and satisfies them, and their artistic satisfaction is multi-faceted. They gain it through expressing and alleviating emotions, proving their ability, and of course, completing their pieces.

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