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A Prolific Writer in and “outside” the Classroom: Blogs v. In-class Essays

Jeremy Godfrey

The following article is a case study of Lydia, an eleventh-grade blogger. I observed her writing in Honor’s English class, and I obtained samples of her previous essays. I wanted to see if there is a pattern in the writing style of her blogs and her in-class essays. I found that blogging may influence her language, but the format of her in-class writing tends to be dictated by teachers. However, in her blogs, the author appears more open with format and style. The seemingly relaxed and informal nature of blogs may give way to deep connections between the text and her audience somewhat disparate from the standard in-class essay.

On the day I acquire Lydia’s¹ permission slip to be monitored online, she is typing frantically on her laptop in the back of the class away from everyone. I am a little reticent about asking her to step outside of the classroom for a quick interview. I don’t want to disturb her writing, and she tells me that her writing is for a story contest. Nonetheless, she agrees to answer my questions and gives me both her LiveJournal and MySpace account usernames. She appears happy to comply with the study, and she tells me that she prefers to write with a computer rather than with pen and paper. She also reveals that most of her writing appears on LiveJournal and FictionPress. Her last post in

¹ The name used in this study is a pseudonym.

her MySpace blog, which admittedly was before the start of the school year, is as follows²:

haven't posted a blog on here in forever. 😞

Well, I can't sleep. School starts in exactly one week and I don't have a locker. Oh well, I guess my back will be hating me this year, as always. I just finished reading [Why Do Men Have Nipples?](#) one of many books I've managed to read over summer break. The books on the reading list aren't any that I've seemed to have read yet. They're just so boring and hard to get through, plus Hemingway couldn't write, and I don't care if I just insulted one of the so called "classics" either.

But speaking of writing, I can't, or rather I haven't. I haven't written much of anything over the break. I just really don't want to lately. I've been considering doing something else with my life. I'm open to suggestions. Maybe I should find a better cure for my insomnia than blogging at two thirty in the morning.

In other "news", I got my hair done yesterday along with some great shopping, more of which I'll do this weekend hopefully. I'm finally going to the doctor soon, which is good after that whole thing with the ER. Medical professionals, as if. The medicine I'm supposed to be taking for the virus I "maybe probably might just could" have is supposed to cause drowsiness, but I've been wide awake.

Oh well, I did get a new Myspace layout of it, so I guess it's not a totally bummer, but the back pains and wrist pains and such do tend to cancel that out.

So, yeah, I diverged from the original subject. I can't sleep (not important) and I need to find something else to do with me time because writing has lost all meaning to me right now. Suggestions? Please?

The post seems to be written out of desperation, and Lydia appeals to the readers to help her with the direction she should take in life. She is impassioned with writing, and she is committed, as her writing on her laptop denotes. It is interesting to note that this post is Lydia's last blog on MySpace. I infer that she has abandoned the blog because there are no comments in response. Lydia does care what her MySpace readers think, as demonstrated with her frustration – writing that has “lost meaning” and her concluding “Please?” Her blogs, in this way, are a conversation with the outside world – a commentary on her life and her goals. I predict that she seeks encouragement and “empowerment” in her writing through the comments and responses of others. Of course, further analysis of her active blog on LiveJournal will prove or disprove my

² To eschew the creativity of the author of the blogs, I keep the same font and format of the blog posts.

hypothesis; yet, the online blog is an interactive journal. As MySpace is designed as a social networking tool, the blog can easily be abandoned if there is no dialogue; there is no one to encourage the blog. It is, after all, designed to be “interactive.”

Of the three girls in this study, Lydia seems to have the most experience writing. Indeed, her free time is monopolized through writing. Although the chief genre of her writing is expository, she manages to regularly blog on LiveJournal. She admittedly says that she no longer blogs on MySpace, perhaps because LiveJournal is designed especially for electronic journals and blogs instead of a centralized social networking focus. As with MySpace, accounts on LiveJournal are free, but there is an option for more features for paying members. Lydia maintains a basic, free account.

Upon observing Lydia’s in-class behavior, I was astonished at how much pleasure she derives from writing. She finished her classroom work early just so she could continue her story that she was writing. She was the only person in the class with a laptop at her desk, and she seemed oblivious to anything but her screen. However, she paused when I approached her. I asked her about the story, and she responded that it was for a competition. She later posted a blog about winning an award from the competition. Although the post had no words, it boasted an icon with a typewriter and the words “2007 Winner Nanowrimo.” I asked her what “Nanowrimo” is, and she explained:

NaNoWriMo is Nation Novel Writing Month and it happens annually every November where participants write a 50,000 word minimum novel to win a certificate (they don't get published, don't win any money).

The fact that Lydia participates in this competition with such a high minimum word count not only denotes diligence as a writer, but it also further reveals that she writes without the need to earn money or publication. Perhaps, however, she does wish to be appreciated and labeled as a writer; hence, the competition and certificate.

Lydia insists on writing on her computer. Some of her most personal posts

convey a recondite quality to them; like her stories, they border on an abstract nature that merely hints at the meaning. Take this entry for an example, which I deemed her most personal revelation from her blog:

A Renewal of Sense

This past Christmas break I realized just how little I do out of school. I need a hobby really bad, and I'm open to suggestions. After all, self-exploration can only go so far and boredom has taken over my brain. On the up and up my room is impeccably clean. It's kind of scary because everything shines, except for the wall on my right when I come in, seeing as that is covered with pictures, paintings, and drawings.

I'm really just tired of being an accessory in someone else's life. Living to only mediate multiple accounts of crisis, calm nerves, and overall passivity may go far on the nobility scale--especially seeing as I am not getting paid for it--but on the excitement end it does not even begin to tip the scales. What really happens to the people who aren't main characters in their own lives? Could they even die on their own without someone else overshadowing them? Even in death, are they shown up and denied reverence? I am starting to wonder if there is no glory outside of the inner circle, and even so, isn't it just really perspective? Living like I'm about to die any second is seeming pointless if this is all it amounts to. Plans and goals I have, accessibility not so much. What a wonderful way to start off the new year, statement void of sarcasm. A new sense of direction is a wonderful thing to have. This is what I would consider some form of happiness, so with every package of undue sorrow I am presented, I'll probably deliver a bundle of apathy. School starts again Thursday. I still care about important things, so is being fed up with insignificance such a bad thing? Happy New Year.

While Lydia fails to elucidate the meaning of the passage, she manages to offer profound self-exploration. According to Jennifer Ishler (2004), journals are a means for self-exploration. Ishler says that a journal “gives [students] a place to record their personal narratives and to explore their feelings” (p. 518). Lydia certainly is exploring her feelings, but her entry here doesn't really call for any response from her friends. Indeed, there is no response. Does that fact, in effect, defeat the purpose of the blog? Certainly not; but as Ishler argues the importance of friends for her freshmen college students, the importance of friends and feedback on blogs fosters a network of reassurance. Lydia's blog is arcane, indicating either that the blog is written solely for herself or that the blog is a challenge for readers to elucidate the meaning. This blog appears to be reflexive

writing, but the intended audience is clearly disparate from those of the other girls' blogs. Lydia's intended audience may be herself. Yet, she seems to pine for a prodigious interaction in her blogs. She says that "self-exploration can only go so far" and she's "open to suggestions" on what hobby she should partake. Her second paragraph seems to be a self-deprecating rant. She wants "new direction" in her life, but she neither says what the new direction might be nor how the new direction might be aberrant to her current direction.

On the same day that Lydia posts the above self-exploration piece, she also lambastes people who send her text messages:

Know something?

Sure fire way to get me to communicate is to text me more than three times. I'll call, get online, yahoo! messenger, or AIM or whatever. Just...god, I fucking hate text messages. THEY NEED TO DIE!

I cannot stand this, every other minute or so some retarded thing being spat out at me. Jesus Christ. I don't care! I just feel like throwing it across the room, or turning it off.

I need an alarm clock so I actually can without any consequences.

Here, Lydia's acerbic tone causes her to perhaps type too fast, and the blog appears devoid of editing skills. Similar to a previous "venting" post, she is blowing off steam; but this post seems to be one more strongly entrenched in annoyance. She types as a result to unadulterated emotion, and her meaning is obfuscated in the fury. She says, "Sure fire way to get me to communicate"; however, she lucidly means that to be "sure fire way to get me to not communicate." However, her rant is exceptional in that it *does* get her to communicate in an opprobrium for text messages. The tirade is a productive release of anger, even if it, like her previous post, garners no response from her friends.

It is interesting to note that a week after Lydia posted this emotional piece on text

messaging, she appealed to her friends to join her for a night out at the movies. No tirade. No opaque self-exploration. Just a friendly plea:

I have to

See the Spiderwick Chronicles. I loved the books, and I have to see the movie, and I need someone to come with. Also, am I the only one kind of happy that Freddie Highmore will be 16 this Valentine's? Yes? Figures. Anyway, I need to find someone to go with me, it come out like...February...?

Of course, she quips the title “I have to,” implying that she is more interested in the activity than with whom she may see the movie. As of May, her plea hadn’t received a response. Although the question is generically addressed to all of her friends, this blog seems to be a step forward for Lydia. Unlike her previous posts, this entry is calling for direct interaction with her friends away from the computer. The post is imploring her friends to “talk” to her. This interaction is not only direct, but it also facilitates a stronger bond among her blogger friends. Theoretically, they will be more apt to post comments on her blogs if the friendship is close.

Lydia’s previous posts often complain of mundane establishment and occurrence of the status quo, including school. An early post asks why she can’t just write a five-page essay in each of her English classes to pass without having to attend them. This statement calls to question what she sees as the insipid pedagogy of the standard essay and the implied pointlessness of secondary education. Apparently, to Lydia, high school does little to inspire. She is not alone in that assertion. Researchers Lawrence Baines and Gregory Stanley (2003) pointed towards the inadequacies in high school education after they interviewed fifty-two students: “At one school *all* juniors, regardless of academic track, had to spend three weeks of their English classes reviewing nothing but material from the state exam handbook” (p. 165). Students want to experience and learn more than how to take an exam; they want to explore themselves. The only exploration

an exam reveals for students is their presupposed ability.

Lydia's real passion is her stories. Incidentally, she receives many posts from other authors on her writing outlet, FictionPress. Set up like a blog, the site allows users to post their stories in their entirety and for other users to post comments about the writing. On one story, Lynn received more than 90 comments/reviews. The story is twenty-eight chapters and more than 100,000 words long, and it is focused heavily on dialogue. Here is an excerpt from the second chapter:

"You know," Kathy said as she wiped the crumbs off the counter clean with a dry napkin. "That was a good one. I'm proud of you." In reality she had to be proud. He'd done so much compared to what she thought he would, which was only viable since she hadn't expected a thing of him.

"Yeah," Helen said, slightly gruffly with her tone. "So why don't you tell us how you felt today, kiddo?"

"*Kiddo?*" Adrien thought as he shot her a strange look. His mother had never called him that. He shook his head for a moment and thought about the question he'd been asked. Sam knew what he was thinking, but waited to see if Adrien would respond. "It was fun," Adrien muttered softly. Kathy smiled brightly and his mother was tempted to ask him to speak up.

"That's great to hear," Kathy remarked before her aunt could say a thing. She glanced over at the clock that was currently reading eight o'clock. Adrien was usually in his room by now, not asleep, but in his room, doing what she didn't know, excluding being silent as the dead. "Well, it's getting kind of late. Don't you think you ought to get home?" She directed towards Sam, knowing that his roommate/best friend Daniel was staying the night. He and Kathy were trying to get Helen to quit smoking, Kathy for the sake of her aunt's and her own health, and Daniel for sake of not having to taste ash every time he kissed his girlfriend.

"Uh...yeah, I guess," Sam replied straightening his posture. "I guess I better go then?" He said in a questioning tone towards Kathy though his eyes never left Adrien.

"Drive safely," Kathy said warmly.

"Bye," came Helen's parting as she smiled weakly at him and moved to the living room where Daniel was sitting watching the

television.

"No," Adrien whimpered softly, almost silently, as he faintly reached out his hand to Sam.

"I can stay if you'd like," Sam told him.

Adrien held up one finger in response and gracefully dashed upstairs, coming back down within the minute, his duffle bag slung over his shoulder. "I'd like to go too," He stated in an almost inquiring manner.

"Of course," Sam smiled brightly at him. "Farewell," Sam said to Kathy, kissing her on both cheeks before strolling to the door.

Adrien merely waved as he parted to Sam's car.

Because they are so entrenched with dialogue, Lydia's stories are written like plays.

Perhaps this play-like aspect adds a realistic quality that readers relate to; and based on the surfeit response, the dialogue captures interests.

The comments and reviews on this story mostly laud Lydia's diligence in writing a story that is both interesting and substantive. One of the most aggrandizing comments is as follows:

Aww great ending! I am so glad they finally tied the knot...maybe someday we can get a "5+ years later..." story? :)
::crosses fingers:: I've really enjoyed this story from the beginning and I'm sad to see that it's over but you ended it perfectly.

Clearly, Lydia receives encouragement and interpersonal relationships with these fellow authors. However, Lydia told me in an interview that the comments do little to offer feedback and do not affect her writing:

None of my reviewers are friends with me on LiveJournal, but one of my readers is--they never reviewed on the site, rather via e-mail and added me on LJ. The reviews don't affect the way I write all that much, because when I post a story it's

almost always chaptered and I have a plot going already. Also, while I do find some of the reviews helpful, the majority are not since they go to the tune of "oh, that's so great, can't wait until the next chapter" or they are upset comments about how I shouldn't have done this to the main character. My reviews end up being a vehicle for the readers I have to vent over the latest plot twist, even though I clearly labeled the genre drama/angst--this isn't saying that I'm annoyed at them since I don't plan on publishing anything on there in a conventional manner, but that I find it kind of funny.

Admittedly, I am baffled that while people bolster Lydia's writing on FictionPress, others are reticent to divulge comments on her LiveJournal blog. Would her friends rather read a story than a journal? One reviewer of her work on FictionPress alludes to her desired support on LiveJournal, though I have yet to see it as such:

i'm just getting started reading your stories over at fp.and i must say i love what i've read so far no educaion,bliss cavalcade and i'm falling in love with these stories. i added you as my friend over on lj if your stories over on fp is anything to go by i'll be drooling bbefore longrna

As this anonymous reviewer states, she yearns for Lydia to post similar stories on LiveJournal. However, Lydia keeps her writing categorically separated. She uses the respective web pages for their intended use, as their names insinuate ("*LiveJournal*" and "*FictionPress*").

While the journal or blog that Lydia keeps on LiveJournal may have posts characteristic of stories, no stories appear on the blog site. She maintains them for what she calls "self-exploration," or self-reflection and venting. It is interesting to note, too, that while Lydia has at least seven regular readers and reviewers on FictionPress, she has only six friends total on LiveJournal. Unlike her FictionPress friends, her friends on LiveJournal do not comment on her work.

When asked about how she feels about the dearth of response on LiveJournal, Lydia appeared stoic and replies laconically:

Like, the amount of comments I get doesn't affect on how often I post--especially seeing as I only have a handful of people who can view them anyway. I would say that in general people don't post for comments.

Her response here refutes my earlier insinuation that she abandoned MySpace because of a lack of comments on her blog. Then I turned to her annoyance with people or “friends” on MySpace for her decision to desert the social-networking site. When I visited her page last, a message that read “Go Away!” to all of her “friends” blatantly highlighted her detachment. Clearly, MySpace did not appeal to either her iconoclastic image or her personality.

I asked Lydia about her online preferences, as both an explanation of the variations among the sites and an acknowledgement of her opinion of reflexive and expository writing. I asked which she like better, LiveJournal or FictionPress, and she responded:

Those two sites for me can't be compared because LJ is meant for journaling and weblogs and things, and FP is meant for original fiction. True, LJ does have writing communities, but it's not exactly the same. If it was LJ against Xanga (another weblogging community) then I would pick LJ, hands down. If it was FP verses FanFiction.Net--a site dedicated to writing fictional accounts of someone's favorite book, TV show, movie, famous people and bands and also the site FP originated from--then I would choose FP, no doubt in my mind. I can't seem to compare the two, though I will say that I use my LJ more often than my FictionPress because with FP I have to type up a chapter in a word document, upload it to the site, and then post it, and I tend to have writer's block or like to have everything written for a story for more consistant updates. With LJ all I have

to do is type in the provided box, change the view setting to friends only or private, and post.

Lydia cites tedium and writer's block as deterrents from updating her FictionPress account as frequently as her LiveJournal. It is interesting to note that while Lydia has writer's block in the fictional world that she creates, she still has the overwhelming desire to write, and the ease of updating her journal electronically on LiveJournal fills this void. In other words, she while she explores ideas for the characters in her stories, she still explores her own ideas. The LiveJournal experience, then, reinforces her story writing.

Lydia's classroom assignments are shorter than her stories and blogs, and they appear to be more formal and prescribed. For example, an essay for her history class meets the minimum, mundane five-paragraph format:

Due Monday September 24th, 2007
Period Four U.S. History—Ms. Turner
Immigration to America: *An American Tail* Compared to Reality

An America Tail, an animated feature, may be cast aside for simply children's entertainment, but it contains much historical accuracy pertaining to the immigration policies and experiences during the 1800s. Fievel Mousekewitz is a young, Jewish, mouse living with his family in the anti-Semitic Russia. He and his family immigrate to America to escape the tyranny—much like many *real* immigrants of their time. Fievel and his family endured many of the tribulations and shared similar experiences that American immigrants underwent, such as coming from eastern Europe, traveling by boat to the United States in steerage, and then dropping in for a quick inspection and name change at Ellis Island before allowance into the home of the brave.

As previously stated, the Mousekewitz's were Jewish—automatically dealing them a card of misfortune. They lived in Russia, a country that, at the time, was entirely against those participating in the Jewish faith. In the 1800s, there were many people who were looking to escape religious oppression in this era and took this as the reason they were leaving to the “land of the free.” Numerous who sought religious freedoms were immigrating from countries in the eastern faction of Europe. Countries in said sector were those such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, the country formally known as Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and parts of Russia and Germany.

When the Mousekewitz family did finally get the h-e double hockey sticks out of dodge, they went by ship. They were but a poor, humble, mouse family of five—hardly a pence to their name—making it only logical that they were to

travel in steerage. Steerage was so low that no one would voluntarily deign to journey a voyage in it unless they were especially desperate. Desperate is the key adjective in the case of nineteenth century immigrants. Countless made the pilgrimage through the disgusting, filthy, steerage that was not only over-crowded and generally uncomfortable, but an incubus of viral plague.

Not even on the shores of the five star rated America, the Mousekewitzs arrived at Ellis Island. Their human counterparts would've arrived at a three story building on the same isle. There they would've encountered a mishegas of people, officials, and foreign languages being spouted out like someone really understood Yiddish. They'd get inspected and marked with chalk receiving either a clean bill of health or get marked for quarantined. Some would even be so unhealthy that they'd be disallowed entrance and sent back to their old country. Among other things in the process of getting into America, there was a change of name in order for those whose name was just too hard for English tongues. Tanya Mousekewitz, Fievel's older sister, for example got her name changed to Tilly, while Fievel's friend shortened his name to Filly for convenience.

In conclusion, *An American Tail* is more than just a children's movie. It is a historically accurate piece of entertainment depicting the struggles and trials immigrants withstood in the 1800s. They came for many reasons be they religious or otherwise (in example, health and opportunity.) In the 1800s immigrants happened to come more so from the eastern region of Europe, for religious and other freedoms, and having to go through a ship ride in steerage and Ellis Island all to get to their dream—America.

While the comparison of the animated full-length feature *An American Tail* to actual Jewish immigration is creative, the format appears to be a regurgitation of the expected standard introduction, supporting, and conclusion paragraphs. Lydia even uses the phrase “in conclusion” to transition her final paragraph. Furthermore, her final paragraph serves less to end strongly than it does to summarize. No where in the conclusion is the significance addressed in regards to the importance of the essay; most importantly, there is no clear thesis for the comparison/contrast essay. In a sense, Lydia appears to write the essay solely as a result to it being a requirement.

There are flashes of creativity in the essay, and that creativity is promising when faced with a mandated requirement for class. Particularly her language helps break the mold of formality. Some of the language appears to be some of the same informality she uses in her blogs. For example, the phrase “not even on the shores of the five star rated

American” appears to be a nod and a wink to the reader, even if the reader in this instance is a teacher.

It is interesting to note that although Lydia sticks to the preeminent format to which she has been acclimated, she maintains a certain euphemism that draws from colloquial speech found in her blogs. The first sentence of the third paragraph is a perfect example of a euphemism: “When the Mousekewitz family did finally *get the h-e double hockey sticks out of dodge...*” (emphasis mine). While Lydia conforms to the five-paragraph format, she demonstrates an intransigence to conform strictly to formal language. The ending, however, seems to be rushed. The fact that she uses one of the standard closing transitions is essential here. The transition is unnecessary and obviates her conclusion, because in effect, the phrase is not disparate from a “fin” or “the end” phrase. The conclusion should be conspicuous and without question; despite the teachings of transitional phrases in secondary education, the “in conclusion” phrase is pointless and unneeded.

Another example of Lydia’s essay for math class on careers shows little variation from the five-paragraph fare. Also, the assignment seems to be trite to her, as demonstrated in her context:

Period 4
September 7, 2005
1st 9 weeks ARI writing assignment
Web design/ Web master

A career that I’m interested in is web design/webmaster. It’s a very interesting job with lots of perks in it also. It’d be a rewarding experience to be a webmaster/designer. I’d have to learn about a lot of html, java script, CSS, etc. I’d really like it if I was a web designer/webmaster.

The job itself is basically about setting up and managing one or more websites. You’d have to set up everything on the website starting from a blank web page. There wouldn’t be anything pre-set up so you’d have to create it on your own. You’d also have to manage/update the site if you were the webmaster. I want this job because I want to learn more html, java script, CSS, style sheets, frames, etc. Plus, it’s a job that you don’t necessarily have to be in an office for.

To do this kind of job you're going to have to have training. This training comes primarily from college. In college you're going to have to get a degree in web design and get certified etc., etc. After you get your certification, you can either get an internship (which will look good on your résumé) for a company or you could make your own site and wait until it gets popular so you can make money off of it. I personally suggest you get an internship first, work for another company, and work on your own site on the side. That way if your site doesn't become popular, you'll still have a job (or if it does you can quit yours).

This job uses math the more advanced you get into the field. For one thing, this line of work deals with computers, and computers are based on two things: computer language and math. In html there's a lot of numbers in the codes you enter, as it is with any scripts you use.

Also, whenever there's a problem with how the page turned out, it's usually because of the numbers. When working with web design and such, it's a sure thing that you will encounter math and numbers everyday.

In short, web design is a cool and rewarding job. You can learn a lot from it and make money off of it. When practicing it, you'll use math frequently. I think it'd be an interesting field to pursue. That's why I want to be a web designer/webmaster.

Again, Lydia concludes the essay with an obviating transition, "in short." She also demonstrates impatience with her topic, which is indelibly chosen by her teacher. Lydia states, "In college you're going to have to get a degree in web design and get certified etc., etc." Unlike the innocuous and colloquial euphemism in her first essay, her tone here appears truculent and vexed. The usage of the "et cetera" as abbreviated appears several times, indicating, at best, a transient interest. To complicate matters, she uses the second-person pronoun "you," although she claims that she wants to be the web designer.

Lydia's math essay was written at the beginning of her freshman year; it demonstrates that while her essays may have improved, she doesn't apply her ability to abscond from the hackneyed five-paragraph essay. Instead, she merely gives her teachers exactly what she thinks they want: a presupposed formula for a successful essay.

Lydia's contrivance to maintain the five-paragraph essay and provide a title to the piece is not unlike Emig's study of Lynn (1971), who was churlish to title her work but did so out of pressure. Emig analyzes Lynn's vexation with titling her work: "With her usual self-awareness, Lynn knows she is hostile towards giving themes titles yet conditioned

since grammar school toward giving them” (p. 71). Like Lynn’s vexation of producing a title, Lydia seems to view her theme as an odious burden.

According to her blog entry posts, Lydia is able to draw intuitive comparison and contrasts without a teacher’s command. Consider her correlation of William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” and music group Dresden Dolls’ “Pretty in Pink” on LiveJournal:

In my English class we've been studying southern Gothic, so naturally Faulkner came up. We were reading A Rose For Emily and when it seemed familiar. I knew I hadn't read it before because Faulkner's hard to get through and I generally am not interested in the subject matter, but I was listening to a cover by The Dresden Dolls of "Pretty in Pink" when it clicked.

The song--or at least my interpretation--and the short story are pretty similar. In the story Miss Emily dies, it starts out that way, and at the end they describe her funeral--and a whole bunch of good stuff, I won't spoil the ending. So, Faulkner writes about these men who go on about how they danced with her and loved her, even though they never really did, that it was just their incorrect recollection. Well...in "Pretty in Pink" there are the lines:

"All of her lovers all talk of her notes
And the flowers that they never sent"

Also, it continues on a little bit lower:

"The one who insist he was first in her line
Is the last to remember her name"

It kind of relates to one of the themes of the short story. Plus, Caroline--the subject of the song--is similar to Emily in that the song continually asks "Isn't she pretty in pink?" Pink can be associate with femininity, but particularly little girls. Baby girls tend to wear plain old pink, if not then it's usually the first color they're wrapped in at the hospital, while older girls--like eight--were a more bold pink if any and still older--like teenage girls--tend to sway towards hot pink and even more shades of the color that pop more. By saying plain old pink it suggests Caroline's immaturity which would be a similarity between her and Miss Emily because there was a crayon drawing that Miss Emily always kept, and it was even at her funeral, over her casket.

...I just realized I must not have a life if I have time to think this over.

Maybe I should be an English or American Literature professor after all. I mean, relating old stuff to pop culture?

Anyway, I have no life, but that *may* change. I might have a job soon.

Lydia's response to "A Rose for Emily" is neither rushed nor subverted by a standard five-paragraph formula. Rather, she more thoroughly compares and contrasts a song with a short story than she compares an animated movie to historical immigration. She even voluntarily provides a specific example from the song "Pretty in Pink" to relate to a recollection of "A Rose for Emily." Note that there are no direct quotations in her *American Tail* essay. However, her commentary following the "Pretty in Pink" quotation exemplifies relevance of an arcane short story in her life through something more accessible – a popular song. By drawing on direct relevance in her life, Lydia not only speaks candidly, but also her tone appears to have little apprehension.

Conversely, in an assignment for school that asked students to produce a play, Lydia maintains a laconic response. While the assignment calls for a script, Lydia produces a scene; this scene could be a part of a whole, but she chooses to produce the bare minimum here. Also unlike her stories, there is no apparent depth to her characters in the scene. They do nothing in their dialogue to make them seem consequential.

As opposed to self-sponsored stories, her interest merely is not piqued with the assignment:

A Day at the Asylum

By L

A group of four women walk into a room bare save for a table and chairs. The only window is barred in a crisscrossing manner. The first, MS. GREY, walks in wearing a white lab-like overcoat with an exhausted look on her face as the others trail behind her. There's KAYCI wearing a straightjacket being wheeled in on a dolly, laughing hysterically, and a contorted expression on her visage. She's being wheeled in by MEGAN who's emotionally aloof to the whole situation. A great sob is heard and MEGAN jumps as JORDYN blubbers her way into the room.

GREY: All right, all right, please, seat yourselves.

The group sits at the table

GREY: Now, today, providing my sanity allows [nervous laugh] we're going to proceed with the "reconciliation" portion of group therapy.

JORDYN sobs louder

GREY[disinterested]: So, because of last year's fiasco—and because the board cut my funding—we're going to do things a little bit differently. We'll be doing a

séance to help you all...move past your emotional issues. Since the board feels you won't be able to handle contacting your deceased relatives we'll be contacting your dearly departed pets. Let's all join hands.

Everyone hesitates before joining hands.

GREY: Now, what you may not know about me is that while a licensed physiatrist, I'm also a well versed medium

MEGAN[under her breath]: And they say I'm the one with the problems...

GREY: [sternly] And proud of it. [Normally] Now, the first thing we have to do is make contact with the other side. I'm going to need all the cooperation I can get, now concentrate. Repeat after me.

GREY throws back her head in a chant to contact the spirits

GREY: Mekka-lekka high, mekka hiedi-ho!

GROUP: Mekka-lekka high, mekka hiedi-ho!

GREY: [Gasping for air] I see...I see...a gopher? A gopher named Jorge?

KAYCI: JORGE! NOOOO!!!

GREY: He's got a message for you.

KAYCI: yes...yes...?

GREY: He says he don't know nothin' bout birthin' no gopher babies, Kayci! Why? WHY!?!

KAYCI: [Begins laughing hysterically]

GREY: I'm getting something else. Something...large. And, and, aqua? An aqua...elephant, yes, that's it, an aquamarine elephant. Named Purpleicious?

MEGAN: What? Can't I name my elephant what I want?

GREY: He has a message for you.

MEGAN: So? What do I care?

GREY: He says that even though you let those African poachers almost kill him for ivory that he forgives you. Even though the years of neglect left him scarred he forgives you. Even though you're the cause of his death, he knows you didn't mean it. How exactly did he die, out of curiosity of course.

MEGAN: I starved him.

GREY[appalled]: A whole elephant? Well, I guess it's nice to know he forgives you, right?

MEGAN: I'm glad he died, I wanted him dead. Don't you understand? You stupid elephant, I'm glad you're gone!

GREY: Okay....[scoots away] Wait! I'm getting something else, something important. It's a hamster, a hamster with a black coat and a sad way. Jordyn—

JORDYN[sobbing]: Geraldo! My baby!

GREY: He's got something to say to you.

JORDYN: Yes, yes?

GREY: He says that he hates your music. Four years, stuck on a wheel listening to "Amazing Grace" 24/7? Come on!

JORDYN: That's good music, he doesn't know what he's talking about! This is an outrage!

GREY: He says you could've listened to some Hawthorne Heights or Saosin or something. Geez, Willy Nelson would've been better than hearing "Pennies from Heaven" all the time. He says he can't count the times he had to hear "High Hopes" Ooops there goes another rubber tree plant. Show tunes would've been a break, he says.

JORDYN: GERALDO! I'm sorry!!!

GREY[exhausted]: I'm going to close the portal now. [Waves hands over table] You know, I think we made so break-throughs today.

GREY is beaming in a self-satisfied manner while MEGAN wears a disgusted expression, KACYI is laughing to the point of compromising her straightjacket's stitching, and JORDYN is wracked by tears, bawling in a fetal position.

MEGAN: Some break-through

Not only is the dialogue in her stories more grandiloquent, but it also adds depth to her characters. Take this example from a chapter aptly named "Communication Skills" of the aforementioned story posted on FictionPress:

"Nervous?" Sam asked as they pulled up to his driveway.

"Oh no, not at all," Adrien faked nonchalance.

"Of course," Sam said, disbelieving every word that had poured out of the other man's mouth. "Why are you so scared of her?" He turned the engine off and set the emergency break as they just sat there.

"She's the one that brought me into this world," Adrien said. "And I'm afraid she won't hesitate to take me out of it."

Sam scoffed. "That all?" He tried to lighten the mood.

"She takes everything the wrong way lately, you know that."

"Which is why we got that extra change of clothes for you *prior* to coming here. Plus, on the bright side, it has been a wonderful Saturday. Great morning, breakfast, great time lounging around all—"

"And a *goodnight* after this," He sarcastically remarked as he unbuckled his seatbelt. "Mom? Can we talk?" He said after he'd ventured past the threshold of the front door. A slight clattering of something, heavy footfalls, and a body tripping over an inanimate object later had Adrien's mother standing before him, casting a questioning look his way.

"I'm sure we can talk," She answered. "We're civilized enough to talk, aren't we?"

"It's important," He said, looking back to make sure Sam was there for his support.

"Spit it out then Adrien, I'm going through nicotine withdrawals," She warned.

"Well *that's great*," thought Adrien. He drew in a deep breath before slowing himself down, lest his words come out jumbled and rushed, though he debated whether or not that was best. "I'm going," He said.

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Lock the door on your way out," She said turning to leave.

He grabbed her arm gently. "To college," He finished his statement.

"Of course you are, darling," She said, taking on that soothing maternal tone he hadn't heard for so long that it seemed almost foreign to him. She smiled and moved to take him in a half-hug, though Adrien backed up before he could allow for that.

"This August," He corrected himself.

"What?" She demanded an answer.

"I mean it," He said.

"Well," She said tersely, her lips forming a mad frown as she threw her hands up in air. "That's just fine. Perfectly fine. All these months spent preparing, all this time I wasted trying to make you feel like your old self! It's just great; I'm peachy keen!"

From this excerpt, it is obvious that Lydia worked more diligently developing the characters in this story than in the scene. The central character in this chapter, Adrien, knows exactly what he wants; whereas, in the scene "A Day at the Asylum," there appears to be neither a central character nor any lucid desire among the characters.

Lydia's longest LiveJournal post, from mid-October, is incidentally her most personal and lucid:

Crazy People: How do they find me!?!

I'm so glad that the weekend has finally come. I have way too much to do, but at least I don't have to worry about school, or--more precisely--the crackheads at my school. I'm seriously just sick and tired of them and their drama. It was report card day and the last thing I needed was that crazy freshman chick saying how I "shouldn't make fun of her in front of my friends and say it to her face." I'm really sick of her attitude. If she really didn't want me to "make fun" of her, then shouldn't she do the following:

- a) not make herself an easy target
- b) stop threatening to beat me up

My friend Cody was the one who asked me to do the imitation, and gladly I did. It's actually pretty funny. The only reason I do this is because of what happened maybe a week ago. I was walking from my speech class to my math class and out of nowhere she comes up saying that if I ever hit her again that she'd break my glasses and put me in the hospital or something. If you can imagine the confused look on my face you'd laugh. Confused why? I've never even shaken her

hand, let alone struck her. I haven't touched her, but she's got this idea in her head that I smacked her.

...I wasn't exactly the only one in the hallway when this encounter happened and, because she couldn't get her insane rantings over with in the privacy of a classroom, my friends heard as I told her that I didn't talk to people with IQs fewer than thirty and to get off the drugs. Today she told me not to mock her in front of my friends and if I want to fight her then I should arrange a time and place.

I pretty much got over fighting people when I was three, but obviously it's taken her over a decade and she's still stuck on violence. I don't care if she likes to fight, as long as she doesn't bring me into it. It's not as if she's strong either, pencil thin and judging by how she holds her ground, easily defeated, but I'm better than that. Why would I fight anyone, let alone a younger, scrawnier, crazier freshman girl? Why do people feel the need to assert themselves through violence anyway? Why does she think I'd be stupid enough to fight her on school grounds to begin with?

I had to deal with her and my guidance counselor for the past week. My guidance counselor won't let me go to summer school to get ahead so I can work afternoons my senior year. It's ridiculous, because she could, but she won't, just that simple. She honestly told me it was because she was lazy. Who says that?

Oh, and there was a pumpkin contest recently and the winner was announced today. The rules were to do a character from a book in pumpkin form, since it was teen read week. The winner won with The Hungry Caterpillar. Last time I checked, we're in high school, and she's not in remedial classes. It wasn't that great, and it's not even because I entered the contest, just that someone else's was a million times better. The person who should've won did a main character from their favorite book (I don't recall the name) and it looked just like her! The prize? The Twilight books(which I really hate, so you see why I didn't care I lost), two in hardcover, which the winner already had prior to the competition. Not even school contests are fair anymore.

But, as I said, I'm so glad the weekend has finally come. I don't have to deal with crackhead freshman, crazy guidance counselor, or the winner of that contest that didn't deserve it. What I've noticed is that while it's the crazy girls and lazy women in my life that make it hell, it's the benevolent saintly ones that make it awesome. My mom got me an mp3 player. I don't know how to charge it, and it didn't come with instructions, but I'll figure it out. If not, I'll ask Cody--I think he has one like it.

As much as Lydia may portray herself to be an iconoclast, she does not believe in resorting to violence. By stating that she doesn't like the *Twilight* series, Lydia further propels her maverick image.

Lydia's propensity to write is not limited to LiveJournal. Although she said that she prefers blogging on LiveJournal to Xanga, she still writes essays occasionally; the following entry is from December 17, 2007:

Should people accept it as their duty to take care of their aging parents?

Three words: not at all.

It was the parents decision to have the kid in the first place, not the kids to be born. By the time parents would need taking care of, the kids would either be starting a family of their own, enjoying grandkids, or living our their golden years

before they get useless as well. To each his own, and if you don't want to take care of someone you shouldn't have to just because you were born. It's stupid to think so and completely illogical. Sure, they gave you love and affection, sure they changed your diapers, but are you obligated to do the same? No. Should you? No. Why is this? Because it wasn't your choice to have parents. To top it off, if a parents needs taking care of because of a medical condition that was totally preventable--and I don't mean anything genetic--then it's not your fault and it doesn't matter.

This is not to say it still wouldn't be a nice gesture, just completely not needed and kind of a waste of your time on this earth.

Will I be taking care of my parents if they need it? Depends, but I certainly won't feel obligated or like it's my duty.

This is the first post that Lydia posts an expository piece and then personalizes it with the concluding lines. She does not use the personal pronoun "I" in the essay on *American Tail* and "real life," but she liberally uses it here in her essay on whether she, hypothetically, would take care of her ailing parents. She said in an interview that the decision to use the personal pronoun "I" in her writing is solely hers:

Well, yes, it is a conscious thing. With school papers I avoid personal pronouns like "I" and "You" because of the voice it presents. I try not to use contractions for the same reason. It's for a sense of professionalism because, as I am taught to understand, out in the "real world" those things just aren't used since it isn't like talking to your friends--plus I think that they don't have a place on that platform anyway.

The use of personal pronouns on [LiveJournal] and Xanga is something different because not only are those not supposed to be professional, but I know who I'm talking to.

It is interesting to note that the "sense of professionalism" is something she "is taught to understand." In other words, she has learned the personal "I" is not professional in school writing. The personalization of the essay apparently makes its content more accessible to the readers than her English essays. Why, then, do teachers advise students

not to use the personal pronoun? Indicative of public acceptance and perhaps even relativity, Lydia breaks her previous record for amount of comments on blogs with six.

The majority of comments are in agreement with Lydia, but one absconds from the extolling group:

you give reasons why you SHOULD take care of your parents, i.e. love, affection, changing diapers... but the reason you gave that stating why you shouldn't is "Because it wasn't your choice to have parents."

that sounds like a pretty weak argument to me. first of all, a person is completely incapable of making that choice when they're born. it's kind of ridiculous to even point out. but you are certainly capable of making that choice now. you could kill them, or just disown them and stop thinking of them as your parents. if you refuse to do either of those, then you ARE choosing to have parents, aren't you? and if you are choosing to accept them as your parents then your argument doesn't really hold up logically, now does it?

not that you'll change your mind. i'm just saying the idea is not as completely illogical as you say it is.

oh, and what if your parents do have a genetic medical condition?

The dissenting opinion offers positive feedback that could lead Lydia to reshape her argument to be more logical. However, Lydia states that she prefers blogging on LiveJournal. I infer that she also prefers to blog *without* receiving any comments, especially when it comes to something that even teeters on being personal. To reiterate, she would “pick LJ [LiveJournal] hands down.”

References

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