

Catherine Barra

Thesis Reflection

When I met with my Arts & Letters Dean for the first time freshman year, he told me that I would remember two things about my undergraduate education fifty years from now—the first was study abroad, and the second was writing an honors thesis. Well, I can say now that this is true. I will never forget this experience.

Writing my thesis was an extremely rewarding process. Since sophomore year, I knew that I wanted to do a major research project on Mary Shelley. She is still one of my favorite authors, and I find her to be an endlessly fascinating person. I did not know that I wanted to talk about grief in her literature, however, until last semester, after enduring a difficult loss of my own. I think this experience has reaffirmed for me the power that literature has to soothe in difficult times.

I will not deny that this was a challenging project to take on, especially given the circumstances. I am very thankful to have had the Honors Colloquium in the fall, as I feel that it established a community and support system for the writing process that took place this spring, which was especially important during the online portion of the semester. In regards to how this experience improved my writing process, I now feel more confident in my ability to conduct research and develop long, in-depth analyses and projects. It is incredibly challenging but rewarding to take on such a seemingly monumental task, and I hope that I have done this incredible woman justice in my reflections about her work.

One of the novels that I wrote about was Shelley's book *The Last Man*, a futuristic science fiction novel that takes place in the last quarter of the twenty-first century, when a plague ravages the planet until the main character, Lionel, is the only human being left. This was quite a strange time to be writing about a novel like that. At the same time, it has been a crucial reminder of the relevance of writers and literatures from the past. In Shelley's novel, she has that characters demonstrate, time and time again, a profound spirit of leadership, bravery, and perseverance. It has been reassuring, then, to see mirrors of these characters in

my real life during this crisis. This experience has made me marvel at the ability of literature to reflect reality, and the way that it captures the essence of the human spirit, which I believe remains much the same throughout time. Indeed, I will not forget this experience anytime soon.