*The Perfume Burned His Eyes*, by Michael Imperioli rev. by Mylene Moreira

Akashic Books

*The Perfume Burned His Eyes*, by Michael Imperioli (known best as Christopher Moltisanti on *The Sopranos*), is a coming-of-age novel that focuses on the tragedy of loss as well as the joy that accompanies new, and unexpected, friendships. *The Perfume Burned His Eyes*, Imperioli’s debut, follows the life of sixteen-year-old Matthew after he loses both his father and grandfather and experiences a strange yet fascinating move to a luxurious neighborhood in Manhattan.

The main problem in the novel in arises within the first pages as it is revealed that two important male role models in Matthew’s life, his grandfather and estranged father, have passed away due to sudden car accidents. This introduces the main tension of the novel and capture’s the reader’s attention, since it is revealed that these two deaths have led to an immense sorrow in Matthew’s mother, as she turns to drugs in her time of mourning. This use of tension (one amongst the many tensions present within the novel, including the consequences of depression, the lack of representation of the lgbtqia community, and the issues that accompany mental illness), is a literary element that is executed very effectively. The many tensions help establish and develop tones including love, sorrow, frustration, curiosity, anxiety, and hope. As Matthew navigates the wonders of a new and overwhelming city, falls into a love that is exciting yet threatening, deals with the sorrow that accompanies the death of loved ones, and is exposed to new experiences by unique and strange friends, he is able to experience a range of emotions that present to the reader a wide spectrum of tones. The tones are made stronger through the use of the first person point of view, which allows the reader to experience firsthand how these experiences affect Matthew and how his thoughts, emotions, and ideas about the world around him change as he navigates and overcomes the obstacles that he is confronted with.

Imperioli impressively develops Matthew, shifting him from a young, secluded, and innocent teenager into an experienced, outspoken, passionate individual willing to sacrifice social acceptance for true romantic and platonic love. The character array present in the novel aids in this growth as Matthew is exposed to various beliefs and ideas that result from the many people he is surrounded by, such as a loving yet fragile mother, an outspoken and intimidating love interest, and a blunt and imaginative role model (as well as that character’s sensitive and free-spirited transgender wife). Overall, the literary elements work tremendously well together and ultimately provide the reader with a novel that is both melancholy and intense yet earnest and full of hope.

*The Perfume Burned His Eyes* targets a wide range of readers; it would probably best be enjoyed by teenagers navigating the sorrow and sense of abandonment that comes with the loss of a loved one, the anxiety and wonder that accompanies relocation, and the curiosity and fear that comes with revealing a new sense of identity. Additionally, this book would appeal to those captivated by topics such as witchcraft, lgbtqia issues, and mental health. Most of all, though, the overall message of the novel, that love and hope can be found in everything and everyone, would appeal to anyone who enjoys coming-of-age novels that include raw truthfulness and unpredictable and heartfelt moments.