

Pulse



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Pulse

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Barnes Award for Undergraduate Free Verse Poem
"Heaven" by John Rutherford

Eleanor Award for Undergraduate Formal Poem
"I Have Sinned" by Theresa Ener

De Schweinitz Award for Graduate Free Verse Poem
"The Water Oak" by Casey Ford

Rowe Award for Graduate Formal Poem
"Audenesques" by Casey Ford

Pulse Award for Undergraduate Fiction
"The Dark Alley" by Maegan White

Pulse Award for Graduate Fiction
"Frank" by Michelle Lansdale

Rowe Award for Analytical Essay
"Dreamwork as a Process of Self-Identification and Ideological
Subversion in *Invisible Man*" by Casey Ford

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Undergraduate Form Poetry

Theresa Cner

I Have Sinned

On Friday evening, June 27, 1969, the New York City tactical police force raided a popular Greenwich Village gay bar, the Stonewall Inn. Raids were not unusual in 1969; in fact, they were conducted regularly without much resistance. However, that night the street erupted into violent protest as the crowds in the bar fought back.

—Ken Harlin "The Stonewall Riot and Its Aftermath"

Forgive me, Father John, for I have sinned.
These forty years I've lived with guilt and shame
for things I've done that weigh upon my heart.
I've tried to find some peace, to no avail,
and cannot even say the awful deeds.
I fell in line with others who, like me,
were bound by honor to the policeman's oath.
We had to do our job no matter what,
but some of us just knew it wasn't right.
We stormed the Stonewall Inn with no regard
to those unlucky souls still trapped inside
who tried to run, but we'd barred all the doors.
We raised our guns and hit them with our clubs,
yet some of them refused to flee in fear.
The stench of blood and sweat infused the air
as tensions rose and things got out of hand.
I chased and clubbed a frightened older man
who begged and cried for mercy on his life.
His eyes were locked on mine, but nothing changed;
I had to do what we were sent to do.
I hope that God will somehow find a way
to clear my name and help me to forgive
myself for doing hateful, evil acts
against the men who did not do a thing
to warrant all the rage that we let loose
inside that bar in June of '69.
I wish with all my heart that I could right

the wrongs that never should've come about
within that place where men were free to be
themselves without the judgment of the world.
Those men who wouldn't give in to the hate,
who chose to make a stand against the law.
I wish with all my heart that I were brave
and not a coward hiding from the truth.
For God has known what I have tried to hide,
that I was not a stranger to that Inn.

Steven Gonzales

The Fall (Doré)

Morningstar, bright shining child of Heaven,
Divine light flying higher than the rest,
Leader of chorus, instrument, and praise,
 pride ravaging your heart.
Sorrowfully watching the stars fall to earth,
Flaming plumes altered to obsidian,
An onyx crown of death adorned your head,
 malice flooding your soul.
Standing upon the crags at Heaven's gates,
Turned away from that gleaming firmament,
Battle worn and blade heavy in your hand,
 Hell beckoning your name.
Shadows from below embrace the Fallen,
Holy songs over which he had command,
Now turned to screams, and the blood of the damned
 covers his blackened hands.

Figurine (Canis Lupus)

Oval crystalline oak colored
jagged edged pedestal.
Ringlets,
aqua, opal, onyx,
distorted halos around the center.

Positioned in the middle of
this carved rock place-holder,
you stand
alone, your head reared back.
Bound forever in metallic casing.

Eternally silent statue,
framed in sterling silver.
Staring,
motionless eyes searching
the skies for a moon you will never see.

Christina Landry

A Field of Dreams

Based on "Happy Couple Silhouette under the Dusk Sky" Wallpaper
by SwanSong

A walk through the field
Where the fireflies dance
Warmth clings to the air
Like stickers to our socks
Stars blanket the sky
A path to the unknown
We talk of our past lives
And dream of the future

Our laughter echoes around us
Like a pleasant tune for lovers
Carried on through the breeze
By the feather's distant flutter
Our imaginations run as wild
As the mare taking full stride
Smiles dance across our faces
As we take it all in with pride

Hell on Wheels

For Stan Lawley 1943-2011

When the long road stretches out for a ways,
I often am reminded of your voice.
Longwinded tales of your once younger days,
the far and hard route always was your choice.
Service to your country led you astray,
but handle bars and Harley roars set your
soul right. The law you never would obey,
once that you were back on your country's shore.
But now and then you are brought back to life,
by people who remember you the best.
The times of sorrow and the times of strife,
yet good times did seem to trump all the rest.
I'd give my life to hear your tales once more
or see your smile when a Harley would roar.

A Widower of a Wild Woman

Roy Thorton to the Jailer on the death of his former bride, the infamous Bonnie Parker, and her new lover, Clyde Barrow

I look up at the bars that keep me bound
in this dark cell. The news in which you bring
upsets me so. You see she was the light
that led the way out of the dark in here.
I wish for one last look upon her face,
but any love she had for me has died
along with all the sanity I had.
The rumor of their love had met my ears,
causing me to wonder the big what if's.
Like If I had not been here all this time,
perhaps I could have saved her from her fate.
It saddens me to hear that when she fell,
my ring she had still on her warm finger.
But newspapers say what they will for sales
and sell papers they certainly do well.
If there was anything that I could say
to my poor wife now in the ground, I would
say I'm happy she was not caught. Far worse
to be locked in the place with nothing but
the thoughts of those I will see not. I fear
the thought of forgetting her lovely face
her hair, or the soft smile she always had,
or how she made me feel. I will not find
another girl like her, they do not come
in pairs you see. I must now say goodbye
to thoughts of her, for she is gone for good.
Never will I hold her small hand in mine
again. This saddens me but all the same,
my thanks I give to you, and I confess,
to overcome this news, will cost my life.

Lauren Schuldt

The Lantern and the Sea

Our hearts are strong enough to beat the waves
Ebbing and flowing across these countless miles,
That separate us, bind us, make us slaves.
We're strong enough to live on promised smiles,
Gazing across the distance at the glow
Of beacons that remind us to hold fast
To precious hope and don't dare let it go;
It's just a storm we know we can outlast.
But when a lighthouse gives off feeble light,
And leaves in shadow passage back to land,
Strong ships fall prey to stormy seas at night;
The hope of sailors crumbles into sand.
Yet cast your darkest doubt behind and light before,
And all the oceans cannot hold us to the shore.

Undergraduate Free Verse Poetry

The Desk

rests
where it shouldn't,
hulking and weighty,
aged,
a battered ship,

once
useful, treasured,
but now a cast-off,
scarred,
and forgotten.

The
faint scent of Old
English polishing
oil
still lingers here.

Its
snug drawers emit
squeals and tired moans when
roused
from their slumber.

Ink
stains, coffee rings,
loosened bolts and screws,
nicks
and scratches mar

the
dulled surface where
once pen and paper
lay,
waiting for verse.

At the Loom

Over and under, out and back in
Fingers all flying, I spin and I spin
Continuously turning, weaving all night
Crossing strand after strand, and pulling them tight

Be it day, be it night, rarely I'm seen
Though dew sometimes finds me (it's then that I gleam)
The sharpest of eyes I seem to make blind:
I'm easy to miss, till you pass through my lines

You ask why I weave; I'm tempted to lie
A mother, alone, must work to get by
It's been 3 days since I did him in
But the children must eat—don't count it a sin

A pile of saffron robes,
chanting in the air,
our breath: clouds of cold,
our skin: uncomfortably bare.
We crawl upon all fours,
the temple floor's grit
rubbing our knobby knees.
The ritual fire is lit;
the priestess' eyes roll back,
avoiding our naïve stares.
To be a woman, one
must learn to play the bear.

*The *Brauronia* was a ritual in which young girls were sent to the temple of Artemis to become women. They entered in saffron robes and crawled around like bears as a means to rid themselves of their inner "wildness" before entering civilized society.

Family Reunion

Persephone, the Great Underworld Queen,
Hated the dreary season of spring
For when that fated time came round
Her family hosted a Deity Fling
Yearly in the land of gongs,
Of robes and laurel laced throngs—
Immortals dancing and drinking all night,
Deafening her with festive songs.
Reminding of her maiden days
Spent tramping through a misty haze
Making flower-woven crowns,
And dancing over covered graves,
Before she knew the truth of things,
Before she saw the rowboat bring
Souls—ready and not—
Across the noxious, toxic stream.
But now those things made up her home,
And she missed her skeleton brush and comb,
And the way the dead would grasp her hands,
Praising her with their endless groans.
Torturous now it was to be
Near the Olympian family tree,

Conscious of their ambrosia breath
And garland-covered vanity.
And all the nectar she could drink
And all their glorious, godly deeds
Could not make her forget the taste
Of that single pomegranate seed

Azma Quraishi

Inclusion

On the outside
Looking in
From the echoing
Depths
Of shadow
A bleak expanse
Of desolation
Its leaden sky
Untouched
By the rays of dawn
Despondent
Yet
Despite the onerous winds
Ever
Awaiting

Through a hazy sheen
Of yearning
Ever calling
Ever chasing
Ever reaching for
A distant murmur
An ephemeral warmth
Of silhouettes
Ever receding

Eyes on
The fading vestiges
Of life
Buffeted by
The oppressive silence
Crumbling in their wake
Faltering

Until
A smile
A greeting
A hand outstretched
Backlit
By the dazzling sun
Of unappraising empathy

John Rutherford

Heaven

When I die, I don't know what will happen.
Nobody really does, but I don't especially,
I don't know whether I shall hear St. Peter's voice,
or if,
when it ends for me, it really will end,
and everything that was me shall fade.

In my head, I picture
a hodgepodge heaven,
pissed off atheists complaining for being wrong,
unpleasant in their dour tones,
and pleasantly surprised agnostics, like myself,
happy to be wrong, but feeling like those years
of self-doubt were pointless all the same.

At the corners, the Egyptians and Nordic tribes
huddle confusedly in clumps, their own gods
sitting at a great table, discussing whether the world
will return to the seas of chaos, or whether the great wolf,
Fenrir, shall break loose his bonds, and a great debate ensues
as to whether the earth shall end in fire and water.

Absent, notably, is the Christian God,
who has taken this time to rest,
as he has, since the seventh day,
he takes some calls from freaked out sects,
who are unhappy about the overpopulation
of their heaven.

Their heaven,
as if they had any right to it,
as if they could decide the borders
of the boundless bountiful land,
as if they could issue visas for entry

with little passports marked with crosses,
and golden gates, and halos.

Farewell Tripoli

Just after four o'clock in the afternoon
of April the tenth, two thousand and fifteen
the colossal antique blew her last horn.

The *USS Tripoli*,
snaking her way up the Neches River
to the reserve fleet at Beaumont;
mothballed, her power station out of fashion,
steam turbines exchanged for gas turbines,
the old for the new.

She's being towed by four tugs,
one Navy, three private sector
to keep her stripped hulk in line
despite the wind and the rain
and the rising tides.

Farewell, *Tripoli*,
for ne'er again shall you
carry Marines on your decks,
consigned now, to the moths
and the salt of the Neches.

Tammy Tran

Justice

I walked into a world of vengeance.
An eye for an eye quoted from the blindest person.
Stuck behind bars amongst the innocence.
Praying for a day I can reclaim my independence,
knowing that it wouldn't come at all.

I'm nothing but a face with a number.
Tortured, judged because of one bad encounter.
Became a prisoner under the system.
Believe me, it wasn't my intentions at all
to cause so many fatal crimes.

Grew up alone, the only thing I learned was to steal, drink, and survive.

Days upon days closer to my execution date.
Where I can request the last meal on my plate.
Tears streaming down my face as I write down my final regards.
Cried the words of regret on paper and pen.

I was called out of my cell today, the first Tuesday of the month.
Stumbled into a place unknown, strapped down into a chair.
Injected with the poison of killers to killers,
"Justice." I breathed my last word, hoping it would make a difference.

Katherine Waterbury

Boxes

Movers come on Tuesday for the boxes.
Massive boxes, filled with encyclopedias,
Cook books, photography manuals,
Books of case law you memorized but kept.
Mid-sized boxes, the contents of your kitchen;
Remembrances of homemade donuts,
fresh baked bread on Sundays, funky spices,
Weird Cajun food I hated having to eat,
branded with STORAGE in bright red ink.
Small boxes, their contents swathed delicately
in tissue, protecting each memory:
A bouquet from your wedding, a boutonniere,
Tiny ivory ornaments, china,
A crystal bowl you gave mom the day you came with hospice
She wept as we packed.
To the new apartment, or Uncle Bob's
Your life: Seventy-three years into twenty-five boxes.

The Needle

Anxiously sitting, tapping my foot
Knots in my stomach as I start to sweat.
This need has become all encompassing.
I eye the needle and instantly calm.
I pause momentarily to admire
the simplicity: such a small instrument
capable of such an eternal high.
I unbutton my blouse exposing flesh.
Leaning forward. I anticipate the sting
Jumping from its prick, I settle myself.
Breathing, patiently waiting for the numb.
Upon its arrival I sit for hours.
Euphoric. Orgasmic. Adrenaline.
Beautiful with pain, forever embedded.

Undergraduate Prose

The Cure

"Amá, no me siento bien," Marissa says snuggling as close as she can to her mother.

Sylvia reaches over Marissa for the remote and pushes pause, "Qué, quieres, Mija. Ya sabes que no debes de interrumpir mi novella."

"Amá, stop. I'm serious. I don't feel good. I have a really bad headache, and I feel like I am going to throw up."

"Vey traeme un huevo from the fridge."

"Amá, no. I want to go to the doctor and get real medicine and find out what's wrong with me. I've been feeling weird for a couple days."

Sylvia pushes Marissa off her and looks at her daughter with wide eyes, "¿Sabes qué,, Marissa? I already told you about talking back to me. Una vez más, y le voy a decir a tu papá . "¡Ve ahorita!"

Marissa reluctantly gets off the couch and walks to the kitchen while holding her head. She walks over to the cabinet, grabs a glass cup, and fills it halfway with water from the sink. She sets it down on the counter, goes to the refrigerator, and grabs the carton of eggs from the top shelf. She looks down at the eight remaining eggs and chooses the biggest one, hoping that it would give her the best results. She figures the bigger the egg, the greater its ability to pull the evil out of her.

"Ten, Amá," Marissa says handing her mother the egg.

"Espérate, wait till commercial," Sylvia says never looking away from the TV.

Marissa places the supplies she had fetched on the end table and sinks into the couch. Her head is throbbing, and she can feel the faint pulsing in her forehead. She hopes that the egg will at the very least relieve her of the headache. Maybe it will work; maybe she doesn't have to waste time going to the doctor.

"Acuéstate," Sylvia commands.

Marissa obeys the request and lies on her back along the length of the couch. She watches her mom grab the egg and wipe the sweat forming on its shell on her pants. Then Sylvia begins the ritual. She holds the egg with the tips of her fingers and thumb and drags it meticulously on

Marissa's body. She begins with Marissa's head and makes small signs of the cross on her nose, both cheeks, chin, and forehead, all while softly whispering a prayer. She does one big cross with the egg on Marissa's entire face before moving on to her chest. There she does the same, making small crosses and final big crosses for each area. This continues with each arm, each leg, and Marissa's abdomen.

"Vóltéate."

Marissa complies and turns over, relaxing into the couch that smells of Cheetos and lavender Febreze. She thinks back to when she was a little girl and remembers the way her mother had explained curar de ojo to her. She said that she prays a special prayer and asks God, Saints, and our ancestors in Heaven for help to get all of the bad stuff out of her. She said that she asks them to help release her from her sickness and allow her to be healthy. When she was young, she never questioned it. She would see the resulting egg, her mother would explain each bubble and strand of cooked egg white to her, and then she would tell her she would feel better. And she always felt better. Growing up, she thought curar de ojo was normal. It wasn't until recently that Marissa had learned that it's not normal, and most people go to the doctor when they don't feel good.

Sylvia begins the same routine on Marissa's back, starting with the back of her head. Marissa flinches as her mother pulls hairs tangling around the moist egg. Marissa tries to move her hair, but her mother stops her.

"¡No te muevas!" Sylvia yells. Marissa lies back down and endures the hair pulling until she feels her mother do the big cross and move on. Sylvia then goes over both arms, both legs, Marissa's entire back, and her butt for good measure.

"Bueno, ten. We are done," Sylvia says holding the egg out to Marissa.

Marissa sits up and grabs the egg from her mother's cold hands. "What if it doesn't help?"

"Ay sí, with an attitude like that, it'll never work," Sylvia scoffs. "I don't know why you have to question everything I do lately. I bet it's that new friend of yours, ¿cómo se llama?"

"Amá, it's superstition. We have so many little tricks that we believe in." Marissa sits up and looks at her mother, gauging her reaction.

Sylvia looks at Marissa briefly, "Tengo que limpiar la cocina," she

says walking towards the kitchen.

"Sometimes we need real doctors and real medicine. We can't just put vaporú on everything and hope it fixes it. Amá, I just think there are better, more reliable ways to cure things. I mean, we treat earaches by sticking newspaper in our ears and lighting it on fire," Marissa says throwing her hands in the air. "That's not normal, and don't get me started on how a red piece of thread glued on the forehead with saliva is supposed to cure hiccups. Amá, I love our traditions, I just wonder why we still do the things we do. You see what I mean, don't you?" Marissa says standing to the side of her mother at the kitchen sink.

"Bueno, if it works it works," Sylvia says drenching a sponge in dish soap before turning to Marissa. "Why question it?"

"Sooner or later you have to accept modern medicine into your life. All of this other stuff is just old, out-of-date myths."

"No, you can't say that. Siempre te cura, dame el huevo para verlo."

Marissa hands the egg over and watches Sylvia tap it on the table and open it into the glass. The egg pours out of the shell as one thick heap of mucus.

"Mira, ¿vez las burbujas?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That means that a girl was envious of you. Mira, tiene un moño encima."

"Amá, somebody could easily say it looks like three bubbles, not a girl wearing a bow."

"Mira, that long line connecting the bubble to the egg means that it is rooted deep in her and she has been celosa for a while," Sylvia says, examining the egg and ignoring her daughter's comments. "She's been watching you and is jealous of you. I bet it's that new friend of yours. ¿Cómo se llama?"

"Amá, you're reading all this from an egg. You don't think that is a little bit crazy?"

"You better watch the way you're talking to me. Una vez más, Marissa, ya te dije," Sylvia says shaking her head at her daughter.

"Amá, I'm just saying," Marissa hesitates. "What if I have the flu or something? I mean, I could have something that the egg just can't cure or take out of me."

Sylvia looks at her daughter with a blank expression. "Ay sí, then

why is the egg cocido?"

"Body heat, Amá. You rubbed it all over me, and I am almost positive I have a fever, so it's not that crazy that the egg cooked."

"¡Ya cabrona! Get out of here! Go," Sylvia says pushing Marissa towards her room. "You used to love when I would do curar de ojo on you when you were little. It always made you feel better, you were never sick after I did it. Curar de ojo always worked on you to take out all of the evil and jealousy."

Marissa hangs her pounding head and walks towards her room while her mother continues yelling about her lack of faith. As far back as she could remember, curar de ojo was the go-to remedy for all sicknesses in the house. You had a headache? Curar de ojo. You had a stomach ache? Curar de ojo. Sunburn? Curar de ojo. Fever? Curar de ojo. Every illness is believed to be caused by somebody wanting bad things to happen to you. It's the same as when Marissa was little and her prima Patricia told her that if she stared at somebody's feet long enough and with enough focus, they would trip. Now, she realizes the flaws in what she has grown up knowing, and now it feels different. She can no longer trust that the mystical powers of an egg and prayer can heal her. She's growing up, and she has to stop believing that everything her mother tells her is true.

"¡Marissa, ven! Hice papas con huevo."

Marissa sits up and looks around her room confused. She grabs her phone and pushes the button to turn on the screen. The screen lights up and displays 8:00 AM in thin white lettering. She groans and forces herself up and into the bathroom.

"Marissa!" Sylvia yells from the kitchen.

"Ya voy," she screams back from the bathroom. She quickly brushes her teeth and heads to the kitchen.

"¿Por que te tardastes?"

"Amá, it's the weekend. Why do we even have to be up this early?"

"Next time I call you, don't yell at me. ¿Me oyes?"

"Sí, Amá."

"¿Como te sientes?"

"Worse. I still feel like I am going to throw up, and I have a

headache and kinda feel dizzy."

"Bueno, después de desayunar, I'll call Güelita and see if she has time to do curar de ojo on you today. Whatever is wrong with you, Güelita will be able to get it out."

"Marissa, ven! Salte del carro, tu Güelita nos esta esperando."

Marissa reluctantly unbuckles her seatbelt and opens the car door. She uses the door to pull herself up and stumbles when she tries carrying her weight by herself. "Angel, ayúdame," she cries.

Angel crosses in front of the car and lets Marissa support her weight on his shoulder. He is about half a foot shorter than his older sister, and the two stumble as they try to walk in step with one another.

"Ay, Marissa, vas a lastimar a tu hermano." Sylvia reaches her hand up to Marissa's face and places the back of her hand on Marissa's forehead. "You are warm," she says before opening the front door. "Mamá, ya llegamos," she calls as they enter the house.

A frail woman with a thick grey bun sitting on top of her head pokes her head around the corner of the entryway. "Mis nietos," she says swinging one arm open for her grandkids to embrace her while the other supports her weight on an intricately carved cane. Angel and Marissa limp over to their grandmother and hug and kiss her.

Marissa's grandmother steps back from the children's embrace and looks Marissa over. "Ay, Niña, estas muy caliente y te vez muy pálida. Ven conmigo. Ahorita vamos a curarte de ojo." Marissa's grandmother grabs her by her arm and pulls her into her bedroom. "Ahí sientate," her grandmother says motioning to her bed.

Marissa slowly lifts herself onto her grandmother's bed and sits there waiting for further direction. She knows the routine by now, but her grandmother is a strong and stubborn woman. Marissa has made the mistake before of skipping her grandmother's specific steps and instructions, which resulted in an attack with a chancla.

"Sylvia, ve a traer las cosas," Marissa's grandmother says to her mother, motioning with a limp wrist for her to leave right away.

Sylvia quietly walks out of the room, leaving Marissa and her grandmother alone. Marissa watches as her grandmother calmly lights a

match and turns on five long white candles in glass vases, each with different religious images on them. As she lights each candle she says a prayer, and Marissa closes her eyes in respect with each one.

"Ya, acuestate," Marissa's grandmother says tapping on the pillow at the head of the bed.

Marissa lies down, and just as she is getting close to the edge of the bed her mother walks in with the egg and glass of water.

"Bueno, ¿estás lista?" her grandmother asks, nodding both towards Marissa and her mother.

"Sí, Güelita," Marissa says, nodding before closing her eyes.

Marissa's grandmother takes the egg from Sylvia and runs it down the length of Marissa's body, while chanting a prayer in an airy whisper. She then does the same thing Sylvia did—first Marissa's face, then her chest, each arm, each leg, and repeats it all on Marissa's back. She ends each area with one big cross.

Over time, Marissa begins noticing that her grandmother's airy whisper gets louder and louder until she reaches a point where she is using an almost hypnotic tone. Each word that her grandmother chants comes out stronger and louder than the one before it. Marissa focuses on her grandmother's prayer and is reminded of the time she watched this ritual done on her little brother when he had a stomach virus. She can remember his loud cries when the egg first touched his sensitive skin and how by the end of the curar de ojo, he was asleep. Her grandmother's soothing yet powerful chant fills her ears, and she hopes this is all she needs to feel better.

"Ya tremine, Mija. Ten el huevo. ¿Necesitas algo? ¿Agua?"

Marissa sits up and feels the room spinning around her. She reaches out for the egg and holds it up to her forehead, hoping that there is enough cold left in the shell to make her headache subside. "No, Güelita. No necesito nada ahorita. Gracias," Marissa says gently shaking her head at her grandmother.

"Bueno, Mija. ¿Como te sientes?" Sylvia asks as she sits on the bed next to Marissa. "Do you think Güelita's curar de ojo did the trick?"

"No, Amá. I think I got up too fast; my head is spinning."

"Lay back down, Mija. I'll warn you before Güelita regrese," Sylvia says with a smile before tapping Marissa's leg and standing up.

Marissa keeps her eyes closed, hoping that the egg will somehow pull the pain out of her head. She can hear her mother and grandmother speaking in the other room but everything sounds muffled to her.

"Marissa, ¿lista para ver que dice el huevo?" Sylvia asks, entering the room a few steps before Marissa's grandmother.

"Amá, ayudame," Marissa says holding out her hand.

Sylvia grabs her hand and slowly pulls her up to a sitting position just as her grandmother walks in the room.

"Dámelo," her grandmother says, holding a shaking hand out for the egg.

Marissa hands over the egg and scoots close to the bedside table to get a good view of the egg being cracked. Marissa's grandmother hits the egg on the side of the table twice before putting it above the glass and breaking the shell open. She gasps as what looks like a poached egg flops out of the shell and into the water, making water splash onto her grandmother's face.

"No no no, Sylvia, yo nunca habia visto esto. Ahorita regreso," her grandmother says before grabbing her cane and stumbling out of the room.

Marissa looks at her mother confused. "Amá, why did Güelita run out?"

Sylvia runs a hand through her hair and leaves it on the nape of her neck as she stares at the glass where the egg has now sunk to the bottom. Marissa and her mother look at the glass on the nightstand and remain silent. Then Marissa's grandmother walks in holding a lemon and shaking it in the air, yelling, "Con esto. Esto sí. Esto te va a curar."

Marissa looks over at her mother confused, but Sylvia is still distracted by the egg. Marissa's grandmother walks closer and holds her hand out to Marissa. "Es un limón, esto te va a curar, Niña," her grandmother says while bouncing the lemon in her hand.

Marissa looks at the lemon and sighs. She knows her grandmother means well, but she wishes they could all go to the emergency room where she feels she belongs. Instead, she lies in her grandmother's bed to be rubbed down with another food item. Marissa leans back and braces herself for another round of curar de ojo, this time with a lemon.

Her grandmother leans her cane against the bedframe and begins the ritual. She starts her prayers as soon as the cold lemon touches Marissa's forehead. The prayers sound different this time, almost like a whine.

As the lemon covers each of Marissa's eyes, she feels her ears begin ringing. By the time the lemon reaches the big cross—going from her forehead, to her chin, to her left cheek, to her right—Marissa begins

convulsing. Her grandmother steps back and holds the lemon high above Marissa's body.

Sylvia screams, "Mamá ¿qué, está pasando?" Marissa's grandmother ignores Sylvia and chants her prayers even louder, overpowering the sounds of the shaking bed. "Mamá, muevete," Sylvia cries, lunging toward her daughter.

Marissa's grandmother takes a step back and leans on the nightstand for support. She continues holding the lemon but stops praying. Sylvia pushes Marissa's flailing arms against her body, "Marissa, Mija, estoy aquí." Sylvia notices blood trickling out of Marissa's mouth. "Marissa!" She pulls Marissa's chin down and sees that Marissa's tongue is caught in the lock of her jaws. "¡Mija!" Sylvia looks into Marissa's eyes, which are blinking rapidly, showing glimpses of them rolling to the back of her head. "Angel, call 9-1-1!" Sylvia screams.

"Ma'am, it is likely that your daughter had a seizure because her body temperature reached a point above one-hundred and two degrees," the paramedic explained. "After she stopped convulsing, we checked her temperature and it was one-hundred and three point two. We have to get her to the hospital right away and try and bring her fever down immediately before she goes into another episode."

"Yes, sir. I understand," Sylvia says, holding Angel close to her side.

"Ay, ¡Dios mio!" Marissa's grandmother says as they watch the paramedic shut the ambulance doors.

Tim Collins

Night and Day

I first realized I was different when the boy across the hall grabbed me by the hair and asked why it was so curly. I didn't really know what to say, so I said it was probably because I sit so close to the radio at night.

The next time I saw the boy across the hall, he was huddled close to his family's radio (practically hugging it, in fact) while he listened to The Shadow stalk organized crime. "What evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows ..." I asked what he was doing, and he said he was trying to get his hair curly. My heart melted just a little bit, but his father didn't approve.

"Why'd you wanna do that?" he asked. "You wanna look like a spook?"

A spook? I hadn't heard that name before. I spent the night in the bathroom, staring at my reflection in the mirror and thinking, "Am I a ghost?"

The next morning, at breakfast, I kept asking my mother if I was a spook. She just got a horrified look on her face and smacked her pan of eggs with her spatula.

"People call you that because you look different, honey."

"How so?"

"Your skin is different."

"Huh? But you're white."

"You father wasn't, honey," she said. "And he's not around anymore. Some people have a problem with that."

"Why?"

My mother couldn't do anything but sigh, and she had a strange look on her face, like she was just about ready to give up.

"I don't know, honey," she said.

I grew up in that small Chicago apartment and soon realized that quite a lot of people had a problem with it. I always wanted to be a singer, a performer on a grand scale like those girls on the Ziegfeld Follies or Ella Fitzgerald. I even joined a theatre troupe on 175th street, but every month I was told by the director, a weedy little man in a business suit, "We don't got nothin' for ya. Sorry, toots. How about you rearrange the scenery? We don't got nobody doin' that."

"But I can sing, Mr. Louie."

"Sure ya can, but so can my parakeet. You don't see me putting that up on stage."

"I can dance, too."

"Honey, you got two left feet."

"Yeah, but they're always pointed in the right direction, unlike some of these girls."

"Look, I put you up there, I got a riot on my hands. Sorry, toots. Better luck next month."

So, I was forced to move wooden palm trees around on the stage and sweep the dirt, while the girls got dressed backstage in their glamorous outfits. My eyes would sting and my hands would turn black from the dust. Sometimes I would cry in the spaces between the backdrops, all while the white girls gossiped about their lives in the dressing room.

"Eloise just got a spot at the Rhumboogie on Thursday night."

"How'd you know that?"

"She told me," the first voice says. "She's going to be singing 'I Got Rhythm' and 'Night and Day.' Rockefeller's son might be there."

"Lucky."

"Oooh," a third voice says, "I just heard Clara Stanwyck's marrying a rich man from upstate. I saw him the other day, all dressed up to the nines ..."

And on it would go. To make ends meet, I got a job as a taxi dancer at the Beaufont Dance Hall. A taxi dancer dances with men for money, and it's pretty much just as degrading as it sounds. Dateless, scummy-looking men file into a crummy, dilapidated old dance hall, pay ten cents at the door, and pick out one of the girls to stumble around with for half an hour. I got tossed around so much that my arms felt like they were going to rip out of their sockets, my feet got stepped on so much that they often bled at the end of the night, and some men couldn't help trying to kiss me, but hey, it's a living.

The one man who troubled me the most was the sailor. He would come by every Sunday, just before closing time, and always with a scowl on his face. I don't think I'd ever seen him smile. He wasn't a particularly good dancer, either, but I don't think he'd ever tried to kiss any of the girls. And they say sailors have a reputation for that kind of thing. Ha!

It was a Thursday, and Eloise was probably performing at the Rhumboogie, but there I was, being scooted around by some wiry, oily,

shrimp of a man with red hair. He looked sort of like a cockroach and smelled like one, too, but ten cents is ten cents, and when there are a bunch of other women lining the wall, just waiting to dance, all ready to replace you the second you can't work anymore, you're not allowed to refuse a client.

"You smell like chocolate," the oily man said.

I wasn't sure that I'd heard him.

"Excuse me?"

"You smell like chocolate," he said, and smiled. Only it wasn't a pleasant smile. It was the kind of smile you want to run away from very fast.

"That's, uh, nice," I said.

"No, really, you do," he said, and I nodded. I already agreed with you, sir. What more do you want?

"I bet you taste like chocolate, too," he said, and ran his tongue up my cheek.

I slapped him as hard as I could and tried to run, but the man grabbed me by the leg. Then he slapped me, hard, and started screaming things I can't repeat here. Things which aren't decent for mixed company.

"You spook! You chocolate piece of \$#!&!"

Soon I couldn't feel my face. It was numb. But then the man was off me, and I looked over with one bloated eye to see the sailor smacking the redheaded man across the face.

"You treat her like a lady!" the sailor said.

Smack!

"You want to hit a girl, huh?"

Smack!

"You had your dance. Now get the hell out of here!"

The sailor shoved the man across the hall to where his friends, a group of burly sailors, were waiting, and who dragged the man through the curtain and out the back. The sailor picked me up (perhaps a little roughly, but not meaning to), and wiped the blood from my face.

"You okay?" he asked. I nodded.

We went out into the alley. The other sailors and the redheaded man were gone. The sailor found a few cubes of ice and wrapped them in a dirty towel. We talked for an hour while he looked after my bruises. It turned out he was from France and was here on leave. The dancing was just a way to kill the time.

"I leave on the fourth," he said.

"To where?"

"To war," he said. "I've got to do what I can for the war effort. Not a lot of our men are making it back, and I may not, either. But 'c'est la guerre,' as my father used to say."

"That's okay," I said. "I'm pretty sure I'm fired."

"Why?"

"You can't slap a customer, no matter how much of a jackass he's being."

"I know someone who can help," the sailor said, and scrambled for a pen. Then he wrote a phone number on my hand, handed me the now-dripping towel, and said, "I have to go. The ship leaves in half an hour."

The number turned out to be for a man at the USO, the organization that performs shows for the troops overseas. The man didn't judge my skin color, only my singing talent and my patriotism. It wasn't long before I got to perform alongside the Andrews Sisters and Billie Holiday, and I actually got to meet Bob Hope. He told his assistant to get him a tall drink of water, and when I showed up to ask for his autograph, he did a double-take, looked at his assistant, and said, "Well, that was fast!"

It took me a while to get a letter to Buddy the sailor, and he was thrilled to find out I got to perform on stage as part of the show. I told him I would be performing at one of the military bases in France, and he told me he would be there. For weeks I thought about that performance and how I would dedicate it to a very special person in the audience, the man who taught me that not everyone has evil lurking in their hearts.

But five minutes before I went on stage, I asked his company where he would be in the audience so I could point him out, and they told me he'd died. A German shell slammed into his jeep, killing both him and the driver just a week before I arrived.

It was difficult, but I still went up there and performed 'Night and Day,' but before I did, I dedicated it to one of our fallen soldiers.

Thank you, Bud.

Maegan White

The Dark Alley

I remember my first year of junior high like it was yesterday—not because of my classes, not because of the sports I was involved in, not because of school in any way. My most vivid memories come from the alleyway between the school and the apartment building where I lived. The school wasn't even one mile from the building, so my parents and I decided it would be fine for me to walk home.

"Be sure to walk with a group of friends though," Mom reminded me every morning, "And no matter what, don't—DO NOT—I mean it—go near that alley on your way back. It's full of thugs and all kinds of bad people. You and your friends rush past that area as quickly as possible. Don't even look toward it." Obviously mom was just doing her job, trying to protect me. I was good though. I always listened to her, but sometimes things don't always go as planned.

For a solid month, my friends and I walked home, past the dark, dank alley. We were all told not to even glance at it. We made up silly games with tennis balls and yoyos. We played tag and keep-away, always extending our short walks into thirty minutes of goofing off. We talked about boys and homework, of dresses and dances, and of secrets that we all thought were so important in junior high. All the while, we acted as though the alley did not even exist. We'd joke about it on occasion. Sometimes my friends would say that the teachers would send the bad kids to the alley instead of detention. It was never a real concept for us. That is, until one Friday when we were released from school early for a holiday.

My friends and I used the extra time for more goofing off. We sat around the parent-pickup area for quite a while, talking about the Halloween dance coming up soon. It was especially a treat for us because we could wear costumes.

"I'm going as a zombie cheerleader! It's going to be perfect. I'll wear my cheer uniform and paint my face! The whole sha-bang!" Maggie said excitedly. Everyone bounced ideas back and forth for a bit. Judy wanted to be a cat (they were her favorite). Corra was the vampire fanatic of the group, so it was obvious what she would go as. She always chatted excitedly about murder mysteries and dark vampire novels, though I was

certain she'd faint at the sight of real danger.

"Sadie! What will you go as?" Grace chimed. I hadn't thought about it much until she had asked. I had been so preoccupied with school, dance class, pageants, and poetry club that the Halloween dance slipped my mind entirely.

I thought a moment, "Maybe an elf. Like a fantasy elf, not a Santa Claus kind of elf. A forest elf. Yah. Maybe that." I liked writing about fantasy in my poetry, so an elf, fairy, or anything of that nature was perfect for me.

After a few minutes of planning, my friends and I began our stroll home. I say stroll because we stopped every few minutes to continue a game of keep-away with a tennis ball Grace had in her bag from tennis practice. Judy tossed the ball towards me, right over Maggie's head and right over mine as well. I leaped as high as I could to catch it. My fingertips grazed the bottom of the tennis ball, and a few pieces of the neon green fuzz flew about as the ball continued on its course. We all watched it as it raced through the air and straight into the alley, disappearing into the abyss.

We hadn't even noticed that we were already to the alley. We had learned to ignore it so well. Our parents all told us not to even look at it and now, there we were, staring directly into the face of the cool darkness of the alley. A breeze swept through the alley, blowing bits of trash around and creating an eerie scuffling noise. It sent a chill down my spine. Frozen, we stared in frightful amazement at the alley we hadn't dared to look upon before. It felt wrong to even look at it. Our parents would be furious if they knew we were so near to it. The smell of mold and dumpsters filled my nostrils. It was like staring into the face of a monster. I couldn't move. My heart was racing and I began to sweat.

After what seemed like a decade, Grace spoke. "It's fine, leave it. It's just a tennis ball. Let's get out of here," she whispered with a shaky voice. Petrified, we all slowly took a few steps back, but before we could turn and run, the tennis ball came rolling back, right up to my feet. I swear, at that moment I jumped higher up than I ever have before. My friends and I raced away, without another word. When we turned the corner around the next building, something caught my eye. Hypnotically, I stopped and peeked back around the corner of the building. I made sure not to even reveal half of my face.

There was a little boy. He was so skinny. He wasn't wearing a shirt and I could count his ribs. He emerged from the alley like a slimy creature

from its cave. He looked about nervously as his dark, messy, unkempt hair fell in his face. I watched as he picked up the tennis ball and turned about, as if searching for something. His shoulders drooped and his head followed the motion. He turned back to the alley, taking the tennis ball with him. Just like that, the boy was gone.

I lingered around the side of the building a few moments longer. I don't know what I had expected to come out of that alley, but it certainly wasn't a child.

"Why are you staying in that alley?" I whispered softly to him, though I know he was far out of earshot. My friends had all abandoned me and were likely home by now. It was getting darker outside and I knew I should get home too.

The next few days I didn't walk past the alley because we were on holiday, but that didn't keep it out of my mind. Before, it would take effort to even force me to acknowledge that alley, and now I could think of nothing else. That little boy looked so small. A little kid shouldn't be anywhere near that dark alley—that was a fact. Everyone knew that. All the parents told their children to stay away from that place. Why didn't someone tell that boy?

At school later that week, I found myself unable to focus on my work. I walked past the alley every day that week, expecting to see the boy. I couldn't make myself stay for too long, though. My friends wouldn't stick around with me if I did, and I definitely didn't want to be alone near the alley. My friends and I didn't speak of the day the tennis ball came rolling back to us, they chose to act as if it didn't happen. They went back to not even glancing at the alley. It no longer existed to them. That wasn't the case with me.

I don't know exactly how long it was before I lingered in front of the alley again, but the chance presented itself again one day. Life's funny like that. My friends and I walked home, talking about Grace's new boyfriend and how cute he was. I noticed my shoes were untied and said, "Hold on guys," as I kneeled down to tie them. "Over, under, through the loop ..."

When I stood up, I was alone and in front of the alley. I was looking right into its indescribable, forbidden darkness. The air was musty, and there were a few dark shapes down the alley. Far toward the back, there was a small, flickering light. I thought that perhaps it was a candle. As I stared, trying to figure out as much about the mysterious alley as I could, a tennis ball appeared from nowhere and bounced toward me. I gasped.

What was I supposed to do? All was silent for a moment. I remembered the little boy. I picked up the tennis ball and lightly tossed it back into the alley. It was tossed back to me, though I could not see who was on the other side of it. The alley was shaded so much from the surrounding buildings that it was almost impossible to see any definite shapes. I could only distinguish vague outlines. The ball returned to me. I was tossing a tennis ball back and forth to something in a dark alley. Looking back now, it doesn't really seem like the smartest decision. I rolled it back the next time.

"Why you not take?" I heard a young voice ask. The darkness was communicating with me now. It had a voice: rough, but very young. I was so surprised I couldn't speak. "Why you no take your ball back? I try to give it back. You lost it before. Why you give back?"

"Um, well," I didn't know how to answer exactly, "I was playing a game. It's fun to throw it back and forth. Don't you think?" I was becoming less afraid. I was certain it was the little boy. He was drawing closer, he gave off a foul odor and I knew now that he must be homeless.

"A game? Oh. I not played no games for a long, long time. Not since I used to have a big family. But I don't got that no more. Just me and Nathan. And he don't like games no more." he said. His voice grew more near. A dark tan arm reached out into the light, but that was all. In the hand was the tennis ball. "Here you go."

I felt a pang of sorrow in my heart. The little boy once had a family. I wondered what had happened to them, but I hadn't the heart to ask. "Why don't you keep it for me?"

"Really?" he asked with excitement. I smiled and told him I wanted him to keep it. "Wow! Wow! Thank you, miss!"

"What's your name?" I asked him. He responded by telling me that today his name was Reggie. Raising an eyebrow, I asked, "Today?"

"Yah, one day ago it was Chad. Different names. I change them a lot. Don't member what first one was. Nathan does though. Said he'd say so if I ever got the right one."

He didn't remember his original name. That told me he must've been on the streets for a long time without parents. I wanted to cry, but held back my tears.

"Well, that's kind of like a game isn't it?" I suggested to the child. I heard a little laugh as he bounced the tennis ball.

"I guess you right, miss. That a good game! You come back tomorrow to throw dis with me again?" I looked around nervously, but

guilt made me agree. I told myself I'd also bring him some food from the cafeteria.

I rushed home after that. My parents questioned why I was so late. I told them I'd forgotten my backpack at school and had to run back to get it. I knew I'd have to come up with another excuse if this habit persisted. I decided I'd say that poetry club was having a practice for an upcoming presentation.

The next day I returned to the dark, forbidden alley with a backpack full of various foods I had saved from lunch. I was always lucky. I had food. I had a family. I had a home. I could travel and play sports any time. I had friends and opportunities. This little boy had nothing, except his elusive brother. I wanted to help any way I could. If that meant tossing a ball back and forth every afternoon and bringing him food when I could, that's what I'd do. The next day I waited in front of the alley. I knew exactly what I was waiting for. A tennis ball bounced from the darkness up to my feet.

"Reggie," I said, "I have something for ..." I stopped speaking as a tall, tan boy with dark brown hair emerged from the shadows. He had a lot of facial hair and was covered in sweat. It dripped from his forehead and ran down his face as he smirked. His smile was that of a wicked person. He grabbed my arm. I didn't want to be pulled into the darkness. *Stay out of the darkness. Don't let him get you in the darkness.* I struggled to free my arm.

"Hand over your money and I won't hurt you. You can go free," he said. I began crying. "I don't have any money! I don't have any money! Don't hurt me. Please! I was bringing food to Reggie. You can have some, too. Please, that's all I have!" The boy let go of my arm and caught his breath. He acted as if the light bothered his eyes and stepped back into the shadow.

He scowled. "Reggie is my brother. He's always trying to make friends with the outsiders. He doesn't yet understand that nobody cares. He doesn't get that no one wants us around. He doesn't understand that people see us as a burden. And today his name isn't Reggie. It's Grayson. I'll take you to him." He grabbed my arm, gently this time, and led me into the darkness. My heart pounded so hard I thought it would burst. I didn't want to go in the alley, but I was scared to fight. "You know you don't have to pity us. We don't want your pity," he said bitterly as he led me through the alley full of pungent odors and puddles of water. There were a few dumpsters and a lot of scattered trash. We passed a few men exchanging

money for something in plastic bags. I couldn't breathe for a moment. I knew they were drug dealers. I was shaking. Nathan laughed. "The real world is scary ain't it, little girl?" He sounded so raspy and sinister. "Those guys aren't all bad though. Joe and Scooter both had my back when a gang down the street almost killed my brother and me. They won't be pickin' on any kids now. Heh." I gulped. "They're good people," he said. "I'm a good person. Well, used to be. I gotta rob people now, ya see? I gotta get things for my brother. Promised my parents I'd keep him safe."

We arrived at a grouping of boxes and tin roofing materials. The makeshift shelter was lit by a single candle. My heart sank. Grayson was inside, making shadow puppets. Nathan nodded and began coughing. He left me with Grayson and walked outside of their home.

"Hey," I said nervously, "I brought some stuff for you," I said. I dug into my bag and got the food from lunch. His eyes widened excitedly. I was still shaking as I handed him apples, crackers, and a bottled water.

"My brother take that ball you gave me. I'm sorry. Thank you for the food, miss," Grayson said. I sighed, slightly relieved. I felt safer in their little hut. I told him my real name.

"Sadie," I said, smiling. The little boy's dark eyes lit up. He was so excited to know my name. He repeated the name many times to himself. His joy was interrupted by the sound of someone choking and vomiting outside. I jumped.

"Don't worry, miss Sadie. That's Nathan. He sick. Been sick since he was little. Somthin' our parents passed down to him is what he tolded me. He do that lots. He feel better later," Grayson said, scarfing down the apple. I suggested he give some of the food to Nathan. "He won't take no food if he think people feelin' sorry for us, but you my friend, miss Sadie. He'll be eatin' foods you bring. You our friend."

I lived in such a happy world, so different from theirs. How could these two boys live in a place so sickly, so lonely? Before I left to go home, I sat and made shadow puppets with him for a bit longer. Nathan had been waiting to walk me out of the alley, "I'll give him the ball back. You're not a stranger anymore, little girl."

Over the next few months, I found myself in the alley more than I ever imagined. I avoided my friends from school so I could help Nathan and his little brother. I brought them food and any money I found on the ground. I even took some of my brother's old clothes that I had slept in sometimes, and I brought them to the alley. Over time, it seemed the alley wasn't so dark.

Joe and Scooter became less criminal-like and more like weird uncles. They didn't seem to have any bad intentions for anyone in the alley. Joe was once in the army and had his own hardware store, but he went bankrupt. He said that once he lost everything, this was the only way he could make money. Scooter had a similar story. Two prostitutes at the other end of the alley, Susanna and Beyonka were sisters. They ran away from their foster homes where they had been abused when they were teenagers, and by selling their bodies they were able to make a living. I got to know all of these "thugs" and "riff-raffs" as my parents called them. Yes, these people were diverse. They had terrible lives, they've done terrible things, but they were just trying to live in a world that wanted to pretend they didn't exist. What could be more heartbreaking?

Dance class and school events became less important to me. Shopping made me feel empty inside, knowing that my friends in the alley really never had the option of just hanging out in the mall and grabbing a cheeseburger at the food court. I eventually stopped eating lunch entirely so I could save all of my food to give out in the alley. I asked my friends if I could have their leftovers when they were done. They noticed my strange behavior, but didn't ask much about it. They were so preoccupied with boys and clothes, how could they notice?

I enjoyed going to the alley so much that sometimes I stopped by in the morning to say hi to my friends. The little boy, who almost every day wore a shirt I had given him, had changed his name many times. He was Luke, Blake, Anthony, Antoine, Derrick, Nicholas, Kevin, Jason, and a great variety of names. He hadn't guessed the correct name yet. He and Nathan had been playing this game for quite some time. The little boy and I would sometimes brainstorm together to come up with really creative names. One day he was "Dragon" and another day he was "Wizard." I looked forward to seeing that tennis ball come rolling out of the darkness to my feet every day. One day, however, in late May, it didn't come to meet my feet.

I became very worried. After waiting about thirty minutes, Joe met me at the entry of the alley. He had the saddest look on his face. "Nathan's not doing well." His eyes were swollen. "He hasn't got long. You'd better come on and say your goodbyes while you can. The little one's not going to know what to do." We walked down the alley. Nathan was in the hut, lying on his side, coughing up blood. His eyes grew glassy, and he reached for my hand.

"Tell him, his name is Abraham," Nathan said as his hand

clenched and fell to the ground, just like that. I didn't even have time to act. I was in shock. Nathan was gone. Tears fell from my cheek as I turned around to see little Abraham with wide eyes.

"No! My name not Abraham," he sobbed, "It not Abraham. My name gonna be Nathan. Like my brother." His speech became inaudible through the crying. I stared upon the faces of my friends from the alley. They cried and huddled around the candle with the little boy. All these people had good inside them. They were kind, they were protectors, and they were a family. Like the tiny candle in the hut, they were the light in the darkness. People feared them, but light wouldn't have much purpose without darkness would it?

Undergraduate Essays

Unraveling the Facade: A Reevaluation of Penelope

The power dynamic of *The Odyssey* is a complicated one, balancing the wills and abilities of gods, mortals, and monsters. Some figures are, in one way or another, overtly powerful (e.g. Athena, Odysseus, Poseidon), affecting the course of events directly in some clear and meaningful way. The character on which Odysseus' fate rests most, however, is not one of them. Described by some as sniveling, pathetic, and even useless, one of the most powerful characters in *The Odyssey* is Penelope. Utilizing her talent for foresight, manipulation, and self-control, she proves more powerful than even Odysseus, and arguably more pivotal than any other character in ensuring Odysseus' successful homecoming and preventing his tragic downfall.

At first glance, it might easily appear that the suitors take advantage of Penelope, rendering her powerless. This would not be wholly inaccurate. They feast on the finest food and drink of her household, they sleep with her servants, they bully her son, and they pester her to choose one of them to marry, scratching at her bedroom door day in and day out for three years. Penelope, understandably, does not relish the presence of the suitors. She weeps often for her lost husband and openly complains about and denounces the suitors. Yet she never refuses their proposals of marriage. Instead, she stalls, making them wait until she finishes weaving a burial shroud, weaving by day and unraveling by night. At any time over the course of the three years, Penelope could unambiguously inform her suitors that she has no intention of marrying any of them, or conversely, she could choose one to marry, securing her own safety. Penelope knows, however, that if she marries, her safety may be guaranteed, but in so doing she dooms her husband and son. If she tells the suitors that she will never marry any of them, she knows that they will seek the throne in other ways, and if they have no further reason to impress her, there is no telling what these brutes, who show very little respect in the current situation, will do. Her ability to understand the situation and the consequences of taking action and to plan accordingly puts her ahead of Telemachus, whose plan seems to be to mope angsty until he is powerful enough to take them all out himself. Her prowess in manipulating the suitors demonstrates that her mental acuity is on par with that of her husband and that use of her

skills is equally vital to the plot.

If Penelope's prowess for scheming puts her on par with Odysseus, then her talent for self-control puts her far ahead of him. Odysseus' chief character growth over the course of *The Odyssey* is his increasing ability to restrain himself, especially by withholding his identity and suppressing his excessive masculine energy and outbursts. Early in the story, Odysseus clearly struggles with this, often dooming his crew with his compulsions. Most notably, he does so as he sails away from the island of Polephemus, unable to stop himself from shouting out his own name to take credit for crippling the Cyclops. For this, many of Odysseus' crew pay with their lives. Odysseus himself pays in guilt, woe, and many years away from home. In this instance and in several others, Odysseus' inability to control himself takes away his ability to control his own destiny, forcing him to surrender power to the gods. Eventually, through a great deal of trial and error, Odysseus comes to learn some measure of self-control. Penelope, however, needs no lesson. From the beginning of the story, she exercises near-perfect command of herself in important matters. For twenty years, while Odysseus is out fornicating his way across the sea, sleeping with anyone who asks (a surprisingly large number of solicitors), Penelope remains faithful to her husband, while still managing to keep the suitors at arm's length. It is a tight rope she must walk, demanding rigid self-control in more than one way. She must, of course, resist the urge to sleep around. Odysseus' hypocrisy would not allow for any digression on Penelope's part. She must also, however, resist the urge to lash out against the suitors, to give them a definitive "no" and shoo them all away, because to do so would leave her family, her home, and her husband's claim and household vulnerable to attack. When Odysseus finally returns home, Penelope hints to the audience (no one in the story seems to pick up on these) that she recognizes her husband through his disguise as a beggar, referring to him as "your master" to Eurycleia (Homer 19.3 88-91). She quickly corrects herself, successfully avoiding suspicion. From this point forward, Penelope strategically withholds her knowledge of her husband's true identity. By doing this, Penelope effectively takes control of Odysseus' official homecoming, putting herself in the place of power, interrogating him, putting him on the defensive, forcing him to prove his identity (his worthiness) to her, and putting his fate in her hands. In questioning Odysseus and declaring her intention to ensure that he is no impostor, she also makes a subtle statement about her place in the household for the past twenty years, demonstrating that she has protected (and continues to

protect) her family, her home, and her husband's place as king, successfully and through her own faculties.

In his article, "Reading' Homer Through Oral Tradition," John Foley explores what he calls "words," which in this case refer to what Foley calls "thought-bytes" (9) used in the oral tradition (from which *The Odyssey* originates). He explains that these "words" can be phrases, passages, or even entire texts. He discusses how these are comparable to what we understand as words in that they are defined by a cultural understanding. Examples Foley gives of these "thought-bytes" are (from smallest to largest) the Homeric epithets like "grey-eyed Athena" (10), type-scenes like that of the feast (11), and "story-patterns" (18) like the "Return Song" (20). Foley goes on to explain that *The Odyssey* is a version of the "Return Song" (20), a story structure with which contemporary listeners would be familiar and one which would carry with it certain expectations. One such expectation, Foley explains, is that "this story-pattern reaches its telos [goal] as a result of the test that proves the wife's or fiancée's fidelity—for good or ill" (20). As we are constantly reminded in *The Odyssey*, with the story of Agamemnon's fate at the hands of Clytemnestra, the "ill" option is very real, and it is completely within Penelope's power to destroy Odysseus in the same way. The structure of *The Odyssey*, then, puts Penelope in place to decide the fate of the story. As Foley puts it, "we notice again and again the ultimate centrality of this figure: as the fulcrum in the plot, it is she (and not her mate) who determines how the end-game plays out" (Foley 20).

Penelope's role in *The Odyssey* gives a much more subtle image of power than is embodied by the gods and heroes who dominate the story. Penelope is not strong in the sense that Odysseus is, or Telemachus is sure to become. She cannot protect her family in battle. She is not powerful in the way Helen is, as she reminds us repeatedly, claiming that her own beauty has been "destroyed" (Homer books 18-19). She does not appear at first glance to be particularly powerful at all—Telemachus commands her around, she weeps often, she is confined to the house, and she seems to be completely under the control of the men and social structures in her life. A closer look, however, shows us that Penelope is absolutely a strong, powerful, and meaningful character in *The Odyssey*. Her wisdom, foresight, and self-control give her what it takes to pull the strings, to protect what she loves, and to decide the fate of *The Odyssey*. Considering Penelope as such a dominant force in the story, one creates grounds on which the modern understanding of *The Odyssey's* underlying cultural

atment of women and power might be reevaluated. The idea of gender
 les in Ancient Greece tends to conjure images of helpless women
 eping out from under the shadow of men's super-human egos and
 solute control. Yet Penelope, despite giving off the appearance of this
 pected role, holds power in its purest form. Her power is not given to
 r, nor is it acknowledged; she must secretly attain it on her own. Her
 wer makes her potentially dangerous to the protagonist, yet she utilizes
 for his benefit. Penelope may not be the warrior, the adventurer, or even
 e femme fatale, but she is every bit the heroine of *The Odyssey*.

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Kara Timberlake

The Identity(ies) Within: One Voice for All

Identity is comprised of a myriad of internal and external representations of self. Some fragments of self include sexuality, gender, and identification/belonging with culture. In the fifth chapter of Gloria Anzaldúa's book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, titled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa employs writing to comprehend and communicate the compound nature of identity. One of the identities she explores in her piece is herself as a mestiza, an identity that contains its own distinctive features, including language, allowing her to connect with a wider audience. Through the rhetorical mode of narration, Anzaldúa utilizes metaphor, demonstrating how each particular aspect of her mestiza self contributes to her overall identity. By refusing to identify solely as an Anglo or Spanish-speaker, Anzaldúa crosses cultural boundaries while also disintegrating preconceived notions about conforming to societal expected identities. Anzaldúa, through this perspective, enables people from various backgrounds to unite in the cause of embracing plural identities without feeling pressured to yield to popular, pre-established identity roles.

Simultaneously "a Chicana, queer, poet, feminist, writer, theorist, spiritual activist, and more," Anzaldúa straddles many borders (Koegeler-Abdi 71). Exemplifying her composite nature in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes, "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)" (19). Labeling herself as a mestiza, a term referring to a woman of mixed race, Anzaldúa proclaims her identity as a hybrid, meaning tied to more than one culture. Struggling with dual, opposing expectations from Anglos and those of Spanish-speaking origin, Anzaldúa states, "Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incomparable frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision" (Anzaldúa 100). However, Anzaldúa emerges beyond these placed restrictions, imparting a voice to the people of the borderlands. Unwilling to conform to a singular cultural role, Anzaldúa, "resists accommodating

the identifying labels that patriarchal society, with its absolute terms, compels her to do. Likewise, she rejects choosing between her racial and historical influences or positioning herself as either a Mexican or North American" (Henriquez-Betancor 40). Instead, Anzaldúa, "welcomes the new 'mestiza's' plural personality that embraces all the different parts of which she is made" (40).

With the medium of personal narrative, Anzaldúa employs metaphors, conveying her feelings about language and the noteworthiness it holds to her mestiza identity. Anzaldúa's fifth chapter of *Borderlands* commences with the narrator's visit to the dentist, introducing the metaphor of controlling the tongue. She recollects the appointment and how the dentist remarks while pulling the metal from her mouth, "We're going to have to control your tongue" (Anzaldúa 75). Anzaldúa articulates the notion of obliterating language in an attempt to subsume into a cultural group with the metaphor of cutting the tongue for the purpose of taming it. This exemplifies how Anglo society attempts to control her tongue by expecting her to speak solely Standard English to fulfill their societal harmonization. However, Anzaldúa rebels against this thought process by manifesting her mestiza identity. In an article surveying the mestiza on the geographical and cultural fringe, Ana María Manzanas Calvo states that Anzaldúa "moves beyond nationalist positions that seek to secure and define an identity untainted by Anglo influence to articulate an impure and *mestiza* consciousness that arises from various cultural traditions and in cross-cultural exchange" (48). Refusing to regard any language and its representative culture superior, Anzaldúa meshes all of her ethnicities and corresponding values into one hybrid identity. Labeling herself a mestiza, Anzaldúa acknowledges that her upbringing in an Anglo environment inevitably shaped her identity. Recognizant that she is the incarnate representing the contamination of manifold cultures, Anzaldúa believes her identity should reflect her Anglo and Spanish-speaking influence. Through the metaphor of the tongue, Anzaldúa resists the indication that those of diverse linguistic discourse should acquiesce to cultural pressures. Instead, she disputes this limiting rationale and by virtue scatters the seed of embracing one's amalgamated self.

Continuing with the device of metaphor, Anzaldúa shares her personal experiences to challenge preconceived notions concerning identity. Furthermore, concerning the dentist's comment, Anzaldúa postulates, "How do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it?" (Anzaldúa 75). With the extension of the

metaphor, Anzaldúa references the title of the chapter and lays the foundation for the arguments she builds upon concerning the pivotal link between language and identity. In this excerpt, Anzaldúa insinuates that the very characteristics defining a wild tongue inhibit it from reaching a tame state. To become docile requires the loss of previous features, most succinctly encapsulated as freedom. The two ideas, tame and wild, are irreconcilable. Likewise, this meaning is applicable to her message regarding linguistic identity. In solely speaking Standard English or Spanish, Anzaldúa is forced to choose polar extremes and confined in the process to a certain culture. However, neither language nor its representative culture truly represents her mestiza self. A prolongation of her previous thought, Anzaldúa inquires, "How do you make [a wild tongue] lie down?" (75). Symbolizing the submissive nature the Anglo society craves for her, the metaphor works to address how without the expression of her plural languages, Anzaldúa becomes similar to a domesticated animal domineered by controlling forces. However, Anzaldúa notes with the use of this metaphor that she, unlike an animal, has a choice about her outcome. She can choose to overrule the oppressive societal judgments by expressing her mestiza self. By conversing in multiple languages, Anzaldúa welcomes her hybrid identity while showing the world around her that she refuses to conform to a singular selfhood.

Concluding the aforementioned metaphor concerning the tongue, Anzaldúa resolves, "Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (76). In this statement, Anzaldúa expresses an accusatory scrutiny of the borderlands she inhabits, reflecting her struggle to relay her hybrid identity to a repressing Anglo world. While the Anglo civilization wants to confine Anzaldúa to their Standard English principles, she cannot solely engulf their language and thereby eradicate the other dialects she speaks, without losing a part of her self. Revolting against the Anglo-placed linguistic fetters, Anzaldúa declares her mestiza identity. In author María Lugones' piece on the borderlands, she explains, "The mestiza consciousness is characterized by the development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries, and by the creative breaking of the new unitary aspect of new and old paradigms" (34). This description of the mestiza collectively summarizes the aims of Anzaldúa. Faced with her different cultures' contrasting languages and ideologies, Anzaldúa becomes caught in a linguistic tug-of-war. The metaphor seeks to narrate Anzaldúa's place within the cultural fissures she finds herself wedged in, a place between

the border of Anglo civilization and her Spanish-speaking roots. However, as Lugones articulates, because "la mestiza is captive of more than one collectivity ... she crosses from one collectivity to the other and decides to stake herself in the border between the two, where she can take a critical stance and take stock of her plural personality" (34). Already trapped in the middle of a cultural divide, Anzaldúa uses her position to deliberately assert her mestiza identity. Her message aptly contains pertinence to any people who find themselves thrust in the chasms pressured by both cultures to shun the other, unifying the diverse audience found in the borderlands.

Exploring the complexities of identity in the fifth chapter of her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, titled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Gloria Anzaldúa addresses many components that comprise the self. Through the stylistic device of metaphor, conveyed via rhetorical mode of narration, Anzaldúa illustrates how language contributes to her mestiza identity. As a mestiza, Anzaldúa observes the distinct aspects that comprise her umbrella identity furthermore allowing her to relate to a diverse audience. Although this paper is centered on the importance of language in one's identity, Anzaldúa mentioned a plethora of other factors, including sexuality, gender, and culture. Direct implications of her work can lead to a discussion concerning identity politics, arguments pertaining to how individuals' politics are molded by facets of their identity. Moreover, these forms of political activity shaped by one's identity are shared experiences of oppression by broadly associated social groups including race, class, religion, gender, and ethnicity. There is an unlimited capacity to extrapolate on how Anzaldúa utilizes other elements, such as gender, to demonstrate that social expectations do not confine her, continuing with her overall theme of staying true to the self. By rejecting the notion of socially placed roles, Anzaldúa crosses more boundaries than cultural, creating a platform for people from assorted backgrounds to unify in the movement of embracing multiple identities without yielding to societal pressures.

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Graduate Form Poetry

Audenesques

1. After "A Shock"

Auden was perfectly right.
Our world grievously shocks:
nothing now is so sacred
or delightful it can't be mocked.
Still, I'm struck by what happened
to lower-working-class me,
born in '75, that is,
the same as Chelsea Handler,
gregarious, codependent grandchild
of a Catholic, alcoholic Frenchwoman,
suspicious of nearly nothing
(except, possibly, Bible stories),
day-dreamer by sea at sunset,
hymnodist of seagulls feeding,
averse to confrontation,
disgusted by bullying and weakness,
when I, I, I, if you please,
at a Chili's in Austin was
heckled by a waitress for praying.

2. After "Musée de Beaux Arts"

Seeing something shocking—
a boy falls from the sky—
the ploughman keeps ploughing;
ships in the harbor drift.

The Old Masters knew this:
humans suffer the same
now as they have always,
forsaken by their friends.

Trying to Poem, Distracted by Hens

Gossips peck at cookies;
their claws out over tea.
Divorced, demeaned, sniping;
screechy, astringent notes

of tunes squawked for ages,
songs that roosters ignore,
cackling about nothing
and shitting where they eat.

Eavesdropping, I Eat My Lunch

The daughter looks older than the mother
who spouts languid, homespun wisdom on
Martians and Venutians, advising
her Baptist girl to consider divorce.

They talk about mouthy kids, gardening,
the desecration of modern Holy Communion,
Mom's new Calphalon roaster.

She assumes her daughter's worry;
some of the age transfers
back to her furrowed brow.
She sits in silence punctuated by passing cars,
not moving for many minutes,
while the younger goes in for more tea.

The Bloom is Off

*Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we ...
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.*
—"The Sunne Rising," John Donne (1572-1631)

Stirred from bed, I'm lovely to you now.
My unabashed petals blush, arousing you;
the earth and perfume of my scent summon
you, who press your face into my folds
and praise the sun for its work in my grace,
knowing that our time is running out,
my beauty brief, your desire erratic,
choosing red one moment, blue the next.

I begin to die from that first touch—
your brutal kiss has harmed me, cut me down
to so much less than what I might have been.
Though you will toss me out, I've value yet;
I'll feed the fertile ground with fruited heart.
May wiser fingers pluck the future out.

Graduate Free Verse Poetry

My Father's Anvil

My father's anvil digs its claws into a wooden stump on the floor of my living room.

Black, heavy, squat, a solid mass of terror.

Iron, with a faint smell of smoke, coal, fire and a demon.

Its smooth face feels as slick and cold as the belly of a snake.

Here my childhood was formed in the sounds of the hammer and the roar of the fire.

The ugly wood stump the anvil sits on was watered with my tears, but it stayed dead.

The anvil felt hard hot iron every day but it always stayed cold.

The cold anvil formed a cold heart.

The blacksmith who lived in the fire and flames stole my childhood.

A young heart is not hot iron.

Yesterday, Satan hammered out the heart of a child on this anvil.

Today, the anvil from hell sits quietly in my living room.

I use the anvil as a small table.

I use it to remind me that everything can get better ... if you can survive the blows of life.

And if you survive all the blows of life you will have a soul of iron.

El Yunque de mi Padre

El yunque de mi padre clava sus garras en un tronco de madera en el piso de mi sala de estar.

Negro, pesado, pavoroso, una masa sólida de terror.

Hierro con un ligero olor a humo, a carbón, a fuego y a demonio.

Su cara lisa se siente tan suave y tan fría como el vientre de una serpiente.

Aquí fue en donde mi infancia fue formada entre el sonido del martillo y el rugido del fuego.

Ese feo tronco de madera en el que el yunque estaba fue regado con mis lágrimas, pero se mantenía inerte.

Por el yunque pasaba hierro caliente todos los días, pero siempre estaba frío.

Ese yunque frío formó un corazón frío.

El herrero que vivía entre el fuego y las llamas robó mi niñez.

El corazón de un niño no es de hierro caliente.

Ayer, Santanás martilleaba el corazón de un niño en este yunque.

Hoy, el yunque del infierno posa tranquilamente en mi sala de estar.

Yo uso este yunque como una mesita pequeña.

Y lo uso para recordarme que todo puede mejorar ... si se sobrevive a los golpes de la vida.

Y si puedes sobrevivir a los golpes de la vida, entonces tendrás un alma de hierro.

Casey Ford

Je suis Jane

On the executions at Charlie Hebdo, Paris, January 7, 2015

I took the train today—
that's really nothing new—
I always take the train.
I write in my head,
think of my son,
listen to the hum of
rail, word, and city.
What's new is my shoes—
one silver buckle
shines at each toe.
An early ray of sun
catches one, and it
sparkles in the aisle,
reminding me of you.
Maybe you'd thought to say
good morning just for me,
in just this flash of light.
So then I thought,
whatever I call you
is wrong, you're only sun.

When the killers left
(me, left me alive),
my only thoughts of you were
why, and why, and why;
just these rolled around
my mind with gunfire echoes,
screaming men, and, last,
a pall of blood and awe.
We are gently moved
by ambulance and van
to sterile, greenish rooms.

am cleaned. Questioned.
Released to my husband,
returned to the world.
Someone says he's found
my shoes. I put them on.
I look down at my toes,
at the dull, blood-crust
buckles, and up
to find the sun.

Trigger

You start out so simple, but then you
add things, take some away—
pickups, oil stains, names of men
engraved by invitation or desperation
to be a part of your history, shallow
scratches in the memory of spruce.
A sonorous scar where your fingers
dug in, held on, year after year,
showing them what you are made of,
that song redeems shattered things,
or that it weaves a spell, at least,
which shrouds brokenness
in a blanket of folk reminiscence.

The Water Oak

Seems patron of the yard—
stalwart, tallest, solid
leaves that do not fall
without the roughest autumn wind,
the hardest winter freeze.

Fifty years it's grown
through fires, electric storms,
floods, and hurricanes
that drove the nearest neighbors
out and out to stay,
but not this steadfast tree,
which bears up loyally
next to my old house.

Invisible from here—
its shallow, fragile roots.
Tenaciously it's hung
by slender threads for years.

At its center, cats
sleep in a vast hollow
where its strength should be.

Also unseen—the future,
which certainly may bring
storms it cannot bear,
that will send it down,
smashing through the house
with senseless, hollow force—
forgetting how it strove
so long to stand up straight.

Graduate Prose

Home Town Drive

"Oh for god's sake, this is ridiculous," I screamed at the motionless cars filling all three lanes of traffic in front of me. I hit the radio knob to turn it off. The "thrilling" promise of being stuck in traffic for a few hours at best was making the commercial-laden music much less tolerable. It had been raining most of the day, and typical Bridge City had flooded again at the major intersection that was the town's center.

In the passenger seat, Naomi was just as unhappy at the situation as I was, but she seemed to be more bored than anything else. I don't think she had ever been in this town before today. I can't say I blame her. The stark landscape of the place didn't look any better from the dreary weather.

"This is it! This is the reason why I don't cut through this town anymore," I continued to rant. "There's a popular highway running right through the heart of this town, and no one has yet to deal with the water that chokes it every time a bit of water pools up! I don't understand why I didn't move away sooner." I leaned back in my seat, feeling resigned to inch-long advances.

Naomi turned away from the rain trickling down her window, and she asked, "How long ago was it when you left?" With those impossibly green, inquisitive eyes fixed on me, Naomi had found her traffic entertainment.

Now, I've done it. The microscope that was Naomi's curiosity had been turned on me. Not that I wasn't flattered she found me so interesting. I just feel awkward talking about my past at times, especially the years spent in this town. Plus, I wasn't sure if digging up old memories would kill time or make me an angrier driver—perhaps both.

"Hmm. It feels like a lifetime ago. Well, damn. I can't remember. Maybe ten years ago."

"You can't remember anything?"

"Well, if I look at a building I can," I said. It's funny how fast I can forget things like that. I mean, this place is where I practically grew up. I glanced around and saw a familiar fast food joint. Before thinking I blurted, "Ok, see that McDonalds over there to the left just in front of the dinky Wal-Mart? I broke up with my first girlfriend Janie there."

"Oh really," Naomi said, leaning on the console between us. Her right eyebrow had shot up almost into her pulled-back dirty blonde hair. Something told me she meant that more as a statement rather than a question.

Real smooth. The first memory out of your mouth is about your ex. In my defense, the gas stations all around, half of which were new, didn't actually help provide an abundance of memories.

"Yup. I chose the joint because I could get up immediately after telling her the bad news and drive away from any crazy theatrics she might lay on me." Back then, a clean getaway was all I was interested in.

"Did she?"

"Actually, no. She was sort of calm, if a little upset."

"Maybe she saw it coming."

True, I guess Janie did have a clue. It makes sense. After the breakup, we still used each other for booty calls over the next couple of years. Even one of my friends said she believed we'd get back together if the sex kept happening. Oh God! She did try to fake a pregnancy near the end. Had she been calm at the breakup because she was planning that all along? I guess I'm lucky the scare tactic didn't work—even luckier that she didn't have a real pregnancy!

"This traffic is never going to move," I moaned, changing the subject before Naomi made me spill my guts. Several cars in front of me started moving and turning onto a small street, angled away from the center of town.

"Where are they going?"

"Ah, the side road! It might be longer, but we're moving," I said with renewed hope and energy as I flicked the turn signal on and stomped the gas pedal to catch up. A minute or two of blissful movement later and I was queuing up behind the other cars to make the turn off the street.

"What other places do you remember?"

"Well, over there on the left next to the dentist office is Bridge City Bank. I once had the nerve to walk in there, sit down with the loan officer, and ask for five thousand dollars so I could custom build a computer. I thought I needed it for the computer science major I was pursuing at the time. The guy's face was priceless, even if he turned me down."

"What!?" Naomi began laughing uncontrollably.

"Eh, I was young. What kid doesn't want a supercomputer for video games?"

"You're still like that. I've seen that monster of a computer on your

desk."

"Probably explains why I'm still driving this rust bucket I call a car from back then, too," I said, suddenly remembering when the bank had tried to take all the money in my savings account. The bank claimed the account was "inactive" because I hadn't withdrawn or deposited a single cent for an entire year. Combine that little scandal, the rejected loan, and the account's almost non-existent interest rate, and it wasn't long before I closed the account. I still don't understand why they did that. It just seemed like a cheap way to cheat those who prefer to forget a stash of cash until a rainy day.

I finally turned off the street and back toward the center of town, crossing a couple of fingers as I drove. "Hell yes," I yelled as I saw the shorter lines of cars, "Looks like this is the shallow end of the swimming pool, judging by how quick the line is moving." Soon enough, it was my turn to surf the car across the water back onto the highway, and I was feeling better already. That is, until I saw the Market Basket store on the strip mall to the side.

"Blech."

"What?"

"That grocery store on my left. I spent eight years working there with almost nothing to show for it."

It's a shame that store, well, the whole company really, is still operating. I used to be so happy working there, thinking I was getting decent pay and not being overworked. I took pride as a college kid working my way through a degree, believing I was helping out locally and being responsible instead of mooching off unemployment or something. Holy shit, was I ever so gullible.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, the entire time I was running around worried about all the back stabbing and power struggles done by both coworkers and managers. The store must have gone through at least four store managers and seven co-managers while I worked there!"

"Yikes!"

"Did I ever tell you one of the supervisors had the balls to tell everyone at a meeting the company was in the red until the insurance money from Hurricane Ike bailed them out?"

"No."

"Yeah. I guess he was trying to spin it to mean we had to work extra hard to keep it that way or some bullshit. I was ecstatic when I gave my

two weeks' notice. And what did I get out my time with Market Basket once I finally left? My work shirts, which half of them were paid for out of my own pocket, and a good dose of reality if I want to be optimistic." I shuddered while thinking about the poor bastards still working there—likely for the rest of their lives.

Naomi interrupted, "Didn't you go to school here?" She was looking at a two-story monstrosity on her side of the road.

"Yes and no. I graduated from what is now their junior high school—the former high school building. What you're looking at is where my junior high used to be until they tore it down."

I pushed down on the gas a little harder. Just seeing the modern building made me realize how I had been between generations throughout school: too young to have seen the various programs and buildings in their prime, yet too old to hang around and enjoy the new versions.

Even my memories hadn't been given the proper time to exist. They were all bulldozed over a year or two after I graduated—like where the new high school's gym is on top of what used to be the junior high lawn. I remember reverse clotheslining a bully on that patch of grass. I'm not sure how or why it started, but in any case, he was a moron for running into my arm while I stood still! Now instead of a monument to my brief heroism, it's just a spacious shell where kids are forced to participate in awkward exercises and apathetic cheer rallies.

"Come to think of it, they rebuilt the elementary school I attended on the other side of town as well."

Well, shit. I won't be able to visit the room where a girl kissed me—on the cheek—for the first time. That memory always brings a smile. I was still afraid of cooties, so she had to chase me around the room before trapping me against a door. The resource center is gone too. There's nothing to show where I had gone every day for special classes to overcome the learning disability the school thought I had—whatever it was.

"We're finally past most of the traffic," I sighed with relief. I loosened my grip on the steering wheel. I hadn't realized I was holding it so tightly while driving by the school.

It's eerie knowing all of the evidence of my past schooling was gone as if it never existed in the first place. It makes me wonder how easy it'd be for me to be erased—forgotten and irrelevant. This town is like a corpse, what with the lack of greenery, the worn out buildings, and the massive and sterile highway cutting right through the entirety of the place. Even

stranger, it's still alive and trying to grow, judging by the traffic, the constant rotation of new soon-to-be-closed restaurants, and such. It's more like a zombie shuffling on behind me, reminding me about a past long left behind.

"Ah, there's the bridge. That's the end of Bridge City."

"It seemed like a nice place," Naomi said as she turned the radio back on. The car had become too quiet.

Maybe I love this town on some deeper level. But then again, I notice I'm not slowing down on my way out either.

"Yeah."

Frank

Still wiping the sleep from his eyes, Frank shuffles into the kitchen. His feline friend, Max, rubs against Frank's leg and meows for breakfast, but Frank only acknowledges the plea with a few mumbled profanities and heads directly for the coffee maker.

After putting coffee on to brew, Frank continues his morning routine by heading towards the front porch to snatch the morning paper. He knows the paper is already on the porch because the paperboy always aims directly for the front screen door. Frank has learned to listen for the double thud of the paper hitting the door then the wooden porch floor, and he always postpones getting out of bed until he hears these sounds. For Frank, there's no sense in rushing things these days. He hustled and hustled his days until well past retirement age, and now—now he knows a man can't escape his own mind no matter how fast he moves. Perhaps if he'd have known that when he was younger he wouldn't have busted his butt so hard, but now his bones creak, his fingers are mangled with arthritis, and he's succumbed to old age. On top of all his physical ailments, he has all day to think about his life and things he's seen, things he's done, and things he's said. Ironically, there are some things Frank knows he shouldn't think about—like the last time he saw his daughter and the fight they'd had. Frank believes that he brings that foul memory back to life every time he thinks about it, and some things are better when left to die.

As Frank bends down to pick up the paper, he scans the lawn for neighborhood kids. He looks at every shrub and tree as he listens for giggles and whispers from mischievous neighborhood kids.

"Can't be too careful," he says, remembering that he had a heck of a time washing squishy, stinky tomato out of his pajama bottoms from the last prank the kids made.

"You won't catch me off guard again," he mumbles while gritting his teeth and adjusting his gold, wire-rim bifocals. "I'm on to all of you." He raises his voice and adds, "And I know where all of you live! You hear me, Johnny Lee Walters? I'll call your mama if I find dog shit on my porch again!"

Frank listens for a short time, then, satisfied that there are no kids

lurking in the yard, Frank makes his way back into the kitchen. He pauses long enough to give meowing Max a cold stare and says, "Fine, furball, I'll feed you now, but after that you can run off and chase mice, or scratch fleas, or whatever it is you do all day."

He scoops the last of the dry cat food into Max's bowl and adds "cat food" to the grocery list he started last week. It's Thursday, which means he will make a trip to the grocery store. He doesn't want to chance having to make a trip on the weekend when the store is crowded with people. Frank doesn't like people.

Frank steals a cup from the still-brewing pot of coffee and finally makes his way to his worn recliner. As usual he opens the newspaper to the obituaries and begins scanning the page for familiar names.

"Well, shit," he says to himself. "Will you look at that? Ol' Clarence kicked the bucket. Last time I saw him was about a month ago at the post office; he didn't look like he was sick or anything. I'll be damned."

Looking back at the newspaper, Frank wonders if Clarence knew he was going to die or if death was a total surprise. "Says here that he died peacefully in his sleep with his family at his side. Lucky son-of-a-bitch."

Max rubs against Frank's leg and meows. "You might have nine lives, but I have to keep the Reaper at bay at all times," Frank says. "Only way to do that is to sleep with one eye open and one foot on the floor. That old bag o' bones will only come 'round when you least expect him. Most people don't even think about death—when or how it will come—but they should; they should think about it every day."

Sighing deeply, Frank folds the newspaper and turns toward the window. He stares out at the old oak tree in his front yard. He stares blankly, without even a blink, until two scampering squirrels break his trance. One squirrel chases another around the trunk, and they both spiral up before settling on a branch. Like a dancing couple, one squirrel moves away and the other follows in quick, balanced movements, but the conversation ends when one scampers further on the branch, runs down the rope tied to a tire swing, and crawls inside the tire.

Max rubs against Frank's legs then pounces onto the window sill. He sits tall, and his tail swings side to side, keeping in time with the grandfather clock pendulum.

Memories float to the top of Frank's mind as if they've been loosed from mire into a crystal clear pool of water. For a few moments he stares out the window, then he chuckles, "I remember when I hung that tire for Allona's girl. What was that ... six, seven years ago? Yeah, that girl must be

about fourteen years old now. Swings ain't of no interest to teenage girls."

Until now, Frank had forgotten about the tire swing. For years he's looked through and around it as though it weren't even there. But seeing the squirrel inside it now reminds him of the last time he saw his granddaughter on the swing. He remembers sitting in his recliner, watching his granddaughter out the window as she put Max the cat inside the tire and spun it around. She had the same strawberry blonde hair as her mother and the same long, skinny legs. Allona sat on the sofa next to him as he stared out the window as they argued. Frank remembers the tear running down her cheek:

"I know that Dad," Allona cried. "What do you expect me to do? You don't like Ben and he knows it. Everyone knows. He's my husband, Dad—my husband! We don't come around here much because you can't go for more than half an hour without making one of your snide remarks about my husband—which, by the way, are racist and hateful. You used to try to hide your feelings, but that stopped after mom died. What's so different now that she's not here?"

Sitting in his recliner, Frank stares at the floor. His shoulders drop a few inches, then he echoes Allona's question as a statement, "What's so different." Neither of them say anything for a few seconds, then Frank raises his eyes to meet his daughter's and continues, "What's so different you ask? My life. That's what's different. Everything is different. Ever since our mother died, the food I eat tastes bland and the colors I see are faded. But you're too busy with your own life to know about that. Busy and selfish! I've never met a more selfish person, and I'm disappointed in the choices you've made. I'm ashamed of you."

Frank knew how hurtful his words were the moment they left his mouth, but he continued, "I begged you not to marry him, Allona, but you did it anyway. You always get what you want. I don't need you here, Allona. Go tend to your own family and leave me alone."

Her saddened blue eyes pleaded for affection, but Frank placed a wall all around his heart that not even his own daughter's love could penetrate. Allona glared at her father as he watched his granddaughter. After a long pause of silence, Allona wiped her tears away and said, "Alone. That's how you'll die, Dad: alone and scared. If I were you, I'd think about that. As for me, I'm going to carry my selfish-ass home to my family. If you ever decide to accept my husband as part of our family then give me a call—maybe I'll answer. Think about this: it's not just his skin color is different from yours; it's that he thinks differently than you, and that's

what pisses you off the most. You think everyone should think and act just like you. Get over yourself, Dad."

She slammed the interior door first, then the aluminum screen door. To this day the latch on the screen door does not catch like it should, and on windy days the door reminds Frank of the day his daughter walked away. For the first couple years after she left, Frank would pick up the phone every few months; he even dialed six of the seven numbers once, but that's as far as he could go.

After finishing his coffee, Frank picks Max up and tosses him out the front door.

"I gotta run my errands, and I don't want cat crap in my house when I get back," Frank grumbles.

Frank steps outside into the heavy Texas humidity. He mumbles, "It's hotter than a whore house on nickel night. I should have moved north when I was young."

Frank backs the old, rusty Chevy out of the driveway and heads to the grocery store with the windows down. The AC hasn't worked for at least a year.

On the way to the store, he grumbles all kinds of things about all the kids on bikes and dogs off leashes. Many of his thoughts begin with "When I was a kid ..." or "My parents would have whipped my ass ..."

Frank pulls up to the only four-way stop on his route and notices a boy on the sidewalk. The boy is so busy kicking a skateboard around that he doesn't notice the old man staring at him. Frank leans over and winces at the teenage boy.

"Why the hell are your pants so tight, boy? For a minute a thought you were a girl!"

Startled, the boy cups his hand behind his ear and replies, "What's that mister?"

Frank says louder, "Your pants! They're too tight! Are you a pansy? Get some man-pants, dumbass!"

The Chevy's muffler rumbles as Frank pushes on the gas pedal, but he still hears part of the boy's words before they fade away, "Screw you, old man! How about you s ..."

Frank grins victoriously as he sticks his arm out the window and flips the kid off.

For Frank, the worse thing about going to the market is all of the people: happy people, laughing people, families, children—oh, dear God, all the children. But most of all, it is all the “hellos and how-are-yous” that really get under Frank’s skin. Frank does not understand why people are so nice to each other when they really don’t like one another, not really.

“I’ll just get in and out of here real quick,” he says as he pulls into the grocery store parking lot.

He pulls his grocery list out of his shirt pocket and decides he does not need a shopping cart:

POTATOES
STEAKS
GREEN BEANS
MILK
CORN FLAKES
~~—COFFEE—~~
CAT FOOD

Frank grabs a bag of cat food and then heads to the produce section where he picks out two baking potatoes and a couple handfuls of green beans. After that, he makes his way to the meat department. While he is trying to find the cheapest package of steaks, something catches his eye. Frank looks up and spots a woman who looks familiar. She is standing over the chicken wings, and her reddish locks are covering her face.

Frank sees that this woman moves like Allona, and she stands with one ankle crossed behind the other—just like Allona stands.

Frank’s heart begins to race, and he quickly looks back down at the steaks and fumbles through the white styrofoam without checking the prices. Nervously, he looks toward the woman again, but he still can’t see her face.

Thoughts flood his mind quickly. Maybe he should walk over to the woman, but what will he say? How will she react? Will she hug him or hit him? Will she cry? If she would just turn around!

An elderly gray-haired lady sarcastically says, “Excuse me, please,” while reaching across Frank for a package of steaks. Frank realizes that he’s blocking the lady’s way, so he quickly grabs the first package he touches. He moves away from the steaks and closer to the redheaded

woman. He doesn’t say anything to the gray-haired lady—he doesn’t even give her a dirty look.

Inching his way toward the woman, he’s still not sure she’s Allona. Beads of sweat begin to form on Frank’s forehead, and he wishes he had grabbed a shopping cart. At least he could use it to hold on to. He slowly moves closer to the woman, inch by inch. He’s scared, excited, and worried, all at once.

With her back toward Frank, the woman pulls a cell phone out of her purse.

“Hello? Yes, this is Sarah,” she says.

Frank feels devastated. His heart rate begins to slow and his shoulders feel heavy. He stares at the floor for a long moment until he realizes he’s standing in the middle of the aisle and people are looking at him strangely.

At the checkout counter, Frank doesn’t laugh or make a smartass comment when he reads the headlines of a tabloid:

“I Had a UFO Baby.”

Frank turns the key in the ignition and lowers the windows. The air smells like melting tar and sweat. Before putting the Chevy in reverse, Frank sits and thinks about his daughter. He thinks about Clarence. He thinks about his wife. He thinks about death. He thinks about time and how quickly it passes.

He watches two blackbirds fighting over french fries that someone must have tossed out of their car. The birds tear the fries with their beaks, eating small pieces at a time. Every once in a while a car drives by, almost hitting the birds, but the birds frantically fly away just moments before the tires squash them. The birds always go back to the place where they were as if nothing disturbed them in the first place.

“Stupid ass birds,” he says.

After a few minutes of watching the birds, he purses his lips, sits up straight, and says, “I won’t feel sorry for myself. I know what I need to do, and I’m the only one who can do it. What could it hurt to call just once? What is the worst thing that could happen? The worse is already done, right? She was always a forgiving child.”

Frank puts the Chevy in reverse and heads home with the sun

shining in his eyes.

Feeling hopeful, Frank backtracks the route he took to get to the grocery store.

"Hell, maybe they'll even come over for dinner this weekend," he thinks.

Nearing the four-way stop, Frank doesn't see the skateboarder crossing from the left until the last second. He has just enough time to turn sharply to the right and avoid hitting the boy, but the old Chevy slams directly into a telephone pole.

When he opens his eyes, he is staring at the pale blue sky; everything appears blurry and sounds echo for a few seconds, then he sees two people standing on either side of him—one man and one woman. Both of them are wearing light blue uniforms.

Frantically, Frank asks, "Where am I? What's going on?" His ribs hurt when he talks. He tries to sit up but two hands gently force him to lie back down.

"Easy," the man says, "try not to move."

Once again, Frank tries to sit up.

The woman says, "Hey! Did you hear what my partner said? Lie still. We're just trying to help you!" Turning to the man, she says, "Looks like we got ourselves a feisty one."

The man replies, "Nah, he's not that bad, are you, Mr. Arnost? He's just scared. I would be too."

The man says, "My name is Dave and this is Amy. Let us help you, ok?"

Frank nods his head in agreement.

Amy says, "You were in an accident, Mr. Arnost. We're paramedics, and we're going to take care of you."

"You look familiar," Frank says to Dave. "Do I know you?"

Dave chuckles, "I don't think we've met, Sir, but I get this a lot. People say I look like a young Mohammed Ali. Do you think so?"

"That's it! Yes, you look just like him."

"Are you in pain, Mr. Arnost?" Dave asks. Frank nods his head.

"Where is the pain? Point to it for me," Amy says. Dave points to his head and touches his right ribs.

"Let's get going," Amy says, and she and Dave move on either side

of the gurney and begin wheeling Frank towards an ambulance.

Amy jumps in the driver's seat and flips on the siren. Dave begins taking Frank's vitals.

"Call my daughter," Frank manages to say.

"What's that? Say that again?" Dave says.

"Call my daughter, please. Her name is Allona Jackson, and her number is on a piece of paper in my wallet." Frank reaches for his pocket and finds it empty.

Dave holds the wallet in front of Dave's face and grins, "How do you think we identified you? Let us get you to the hospital first, Mr. Arnost. I'll call her after we get you checked in, I promise."

Frank's face reddens, "Call her now. Right. Now. You got that, or are you too dumb to understand English?"

Dave locks eyes with Frank. They stare at one another until Frank finally looks away.

"Look," Frank says calmly, "I have not talked to my daughter in years, you understand that? I need to talk to her. I can barely remember what her voice sounds like. She's all I have, or had, or whatever. Trust me, I don't like asking for your help, but I don't have much of a choice. What do you say? Help an old man out?"

Dave replies with a smile, "Fine. I'll call. I don't want you to start crying like a little girl."

Frank shoots Dave the finger.

"Ok, brother. The doctor should be here soon. Our job is done, so I'll see you on the flip-side," Dave says as he hands Frank the TV remote control.

Frank replies, "That jackass skateboard kid—is he ok?"

"Not a scratch on him."

"Good. I'm glad he's alive, but that little asshole almost got me killed, didn't he?"

Dave chuckles, "You're lucky you're alive. That telephone pole doesn't like you much."

Frank pulls the hospital sheet up to his chest and says, "So she said she's on her way?"

"Yep. She said she'd be here in ten minutes and that was about five minutes ago."

"Did she say if anyone was with her?"

"She didn't say," Dave says as he salutes Frank and begins closing the door behind him.

"Leave it open, will ya'. I think I'm clusterphobic or whatever you call it."

Dave laughs, pushes the door open, and whistles a tune as he walks away.

The smirk leaves Frank's face as he looks at the bandage on his arm. He touches his face, feeling for the bandages under his eye and on his forehead.

Frank sighs and flips the channel just in time to hear Archie Bunker say, "Well woop dee-doo, Meathead!" Frank laughs.

Suddenly, the hospital staff begins shouting and moving quickly outside Frank's door. A young, female nurse enters Frank's room, "Looks like you got yourself banged up pretty good. My name's Gina, and I'll be your nurse. Right now, I just need to get your vitals."

"What's going on out there?" Frank asks.

"Looks like another auto accident," the nurse replies. The two don't speak again until the nurse begins removing the blood pressure cuff. "One-sixty over ninety. That's a little high, but you'll live."

Frank doesn't reply.

"I was about to say that your doctor should be in soon, but it looks like this auto accident is priority, so you might as well get comfortable. You may be here a while."

"Great," Frank replies. "Listen, my daughter is on her way. Keep an eye out for her? She's tall and has long red hair."

"Will do."

"Thanks," Frank replies as he returns his attention to Archie Bunker.

After a few minutes, Frank hears more shouting. This time a male shouts, "But she's my wife! I have a right to see her!"

"Mr. Jackson, you cannot go in there. Doctor's orders!"

Frank quickly throws off the hospital sheet, moves off of his bed, and rushes toward the doorway of his room. Shocked, he watches his son-in-law and a nurse argue. Frank wants to walk toward Ben, but his feet won't move. A man in a long white lab coat with a stethoscope around his neck walks up and puts a hand on Ben's shoulder. The man speaks calmly and quietly. Finally, Ben lowers his head into the palms of his hands and sobs. The doctor motions to a nurse who escorts Ben to a waiting room.

Frank begins maneuvering down the long hallway toward the direction the doctor came from. His feet feel weighted, and his heart pounds the seconds away. He reaches the room just before the nurse pulls the sheet over Allona's face. Frank collapses into a chair outside the doorway.

Frank hears the staff talking, "Speeding ... red light ... so sad." He wants to scream, or run, or evaporate. At first he tries to hold back the sobbing, but there's no use.

Frank knows Allona was headed to see him. He knows that it's because of him that she was speeding. He didn't have time to say anything. He didn't have time to make any apologies. But most of all, he didn't have time to ask for forgiveness.

He thinks about their last argument. He thinks about all those years he went without calling her. He thinks about his granddaughter. He thinks about his wife. He thinks about death. He thinks about time and how slowly it will pass.

Graduate Essay

Dreamwork as a Process of Self-Identification and Ideological Subversion in *Invisible Man*

Thanks to e-book technology, we can quickly ascertain that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* contains more than ninety occurrences of the word *dream* in many of its contextual possibilities. *Nightmares* also feature in the novel, although that term is used far fewer times. Several characters speak of "the American dream" and the overarching dream of equality, and the Narrator frequently describes people and events as dreamlike. More significantly, the Narrator takes us through a number of his dreams and nightmares in detail. By looking closely at several of these dream narratives throughout the novel, we see how, in various ways, they are pathways to the Narrator's grasp of reality and of his own identity, and they are a means by which he is able to negate the identities imposed on him by the various ideologies in which he is immersed.

Freud says that dreamwork is the process by which the latent content of our dreams, or that content which we can only arrive at unconsciously, becomes the manifest content, or that which we can remember in the waking state (Freud 19). What we know of the Invisible Narrator's dreams and nightmares constitutes the manifest content of them. We can assume, then, that the dreamwork has already been done and analyze what we read to determine how the Narrator achieves self-identification through what he can recall of his dreams.

Except for the dreams described in the Prologue and Epilogue, which we will discuss last as they occur last chronologically, the Narrator first describes a dream he has shortly after the battle royal scene in the first chapter. He dreams that he is at the circus with his grandfather, and he is carrying the briefcase he has just won in the battle royal—the briefcase which, in reality, contained his college scholarship, but in the dream contains only an endless number of envelopes within envelopes. His grandfather tells him, in the dream, that the envelopes represent years, and he points to one, which the Narrator opens to find a note that reads, "To Whom it May Concern, Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (33). This dream represents the point in the novel at which the Narrator's identity is most opaque. He has always struggled with his grandfather's legacy of "overcoming them with yeses" (16), or of being a meek-mannered person,

and up to this point, the Narrator has lived his life with that same meekness to the outward approval of the white people in his sphere. If we agree with Freud that dreams are "concealed realizations of repressed desires" (85), then this circus dream might represent the Narrator's repressed desire to break free from his early adoption of submissive "yeses."

The hospital scene in Chapter Eleven is not a dream narrative per se, but the Narrator seems to be operating more from the unconscious than from the conscious as he experiences a rebirth of sorts. He moves into half-wakefulness after the explosion at the paint factory, being triaged in the hospital and prepared for some sort of asurgical, personality-altering brain procedure, and he says, "My mind was blank, as though I had just begun to live" (229). After several electrical procedures, he awakens more fully and experiences a crisis of identity in which he can remember little about any part of his life. We might examine the hospital scene as a long lucid dream, or one in which the dreamer realizes that he or she is dreaming. One scholar discusses lucid dreaming as a heightened awareness of *différance*—which Jacques Derrida says results in continuous variations in meaning—and that "to wake up in dreams suggests transforming all signifiers and pushing one's self-identity to the limits" (Lee). As the Narrator moves back into the conscious state, he experiences a wiping clean of his identical slate. In fact, the allusion to rebirth is unmistakable in that the doctors and nurses literally cut cords away from his abdomen and practically shove him out the hospital door into the cold world where he must begin to create himself once again.

There are many other moments in the novel in which the Narrator functions and remembers as if in a lucid dream; significantly, he has this experience after Tod Clifton is shot. The Narrator leaves the subway and walks into the crowded streets where some boys who have robbed a five-and-dime are being chased by the storekeeper. A woman trips the storekeeper so that the boys can get away. The Narrator empathizes with the boys and also feels demoralized by the looting and rioting taking place. Bearing the shock of Clifton's shooting and the burden of guilt that all of his work for the Brotherhood has been ineffective, the Narrator reflects that "no great change had been made. And it was all my fault. I'd been so fascinated by the motion that I'd forgotten to measure what it was bringing forth. I'd been asleep, dreaming" (437). It is in dreamlike moments such as this that the Narrator is able to begin cultivating his own identity and subverting the ideology of the Brotherhood.

One motto of the Nazi party was "Deutschland, erwache!" (Germany, awaken!) In a discussion of dreams, Theodor Adorno talked about how following this command to awaken was actually to do the opposite; in dreaming we escape social antipathy (Žižek). If we apply this same idea to lucid dreaming and to the looser structures of being awake but not fully conscious, we might see how the Narrator moves through the rioting and violence of Chapter Twenty-five in a dream-state in order to avoid the reality of what is happening around him and also as a means of finding his way out of the chaos with his identity intact. In the beginning of the scene, a bullet grazes his temple. This seems to push him into the dream-state where he remains for the duration of the rioting. "A curtain of sparks ... lit up the block like a blue dream; a dream I was dreaming ... There was something I had to do and I knew that my forgetfulness wasn't real, as one knows that the forgotten details of certain dreams are not truly forgotten but evaded" (526-8). The dream-state is a coping mechanism, a survival device—and not just his physical survival, but that of his entire identity, new, developing, and fragile.

One of the most crucial dream narratives in the novel is near the end of Chapter Twenty-five when the Narrator stumbles, wounded, bloody, and disoriented, down a narrow passageway into a dark "dimensionless" room, where he knocks his head against a wall, adding injury to injury and slipping into a state he describes as "a state neither of dreaming nor of waking, but somewhere in between" (559). He dreams (lucidly, we will assume) that he is being held prisoner by all those men who had hijacked his identity at some point through ideology: Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, Ras, and several nameless others. "I'm through with all your illusions and lies, I'm through running" (560), he says; Jack asks him how that freedom feels, and he answers that it feels "painful and empty" (560). The conversation does not end there; it continues with several important ideas about spirituality, history, and the machinations of the world, but most importantly in this half-dream, the Narrator finally claims his true identity.

In the prologue, our Invisible Man continues to dream, and one dream narrative here happens as, high on reefer, he listens to Louis Armstrong's "Black and Blue." More secure in his sense of personal identity, the Narrator is still searching for answers to his questions, and he is still troubled by questions about his past, although he is more willing to confront them. In his drug-induced dream-state, he talks with a freed slave woman who is ambivalent about her freedom, which ambivalence he says he can certainly relate to. The woman tells the Narrator that she loved her master—she bore sons by him—but that she loved her freedom more. He

asks her about freedom—what it means, what it is, and he makes her sick with his questions. One of her sons begins to beat him, then the jazz takes over, filling his ears and head; he hears footsteps and thinks that Ras is coming for him. A machine speeds past, injuring him, and he awakens. What is most interesting about this dream, outside of its being rife with literary symbolism, is how it propels him fully into an acceptance of reality. He swears off drugs in favor of lucidity, a clear sense of time, and the ability to act immediately when called. “As Lacan put it, the Truth has the structure of a fiction: what appears in the guise of dreaming, or even daydreaming, is sometimes the truth on whose repression social reality is founded. Therein resides the ultimate lesson of [Freud]: reality is for those who cannot sustain the dream” (Žižek). In dreams, we heal ourselves. We may avoid reality for a time as a means of dealing with fear or pain, but at some point we must awaken from dreams so that we can act on the Truth to which they have led us.

Ironically, it seems that as the narrator begins to fully understand himself as invisible to others, he comes to visualize his true identity more clearly, and he arrives at this truth due, in part, to his understanding and working through his own dreams. Another irony present in the dreams of *The Invisible Man* is the manner in which, through dreaming and dreamwork, the Narrator subverts ideology, which Marx and Engels describe as “pure illusion, a pure dream ... an imaginary construction” (154-55). His dreams turn out to be far nearer to reality than any of the ideologies to which he is subjected (Bledsoe’s) or which he accepts willingly (Brotherhood’s). Louis Althusser’s concept of ideologies is that through them, prevailing social structures and institutions inform the identities of human subjects, and this truth negates the humanist notion of self-determinism (1355). How fascinating it is to think that the elusive process of dreaming, which would seem to be less real than anything existing in the waking world, proves to be a vehicle by which the Narrator moves beyond ideology, which Althusser, agreeing with Marx and Engels, says is the true dream.

The Narrator seems, in the prologue and epilogue, on the verge of another revelation; he seems to be at a place where he feels as though his work has only just begun. Certainly he was sent underground by a great revelation, but he has more to learn. The process of moving out of ideology is arduous, and Adorno says it is impossible. However, as people who are at all times acted upon by the forces and machinations of ideology, we can maintain a spiritual and intellectual identity that is singular to ourselves.

One way to access that identity is unconsciously through dreams. The Narrator may have broken free of the dogmatic snares of the Brotherhood, his memory of his grandfather, Bledsoe and Norton, and Ras, but he still seems, as demonstrated in the reefer dream, to be coming to terms with his past and how he will let that part of himself become part of his newfound “freedom.” When he asks, “Old woman, what is this freedom you love so well?” (11), it seems that he is still taking steps toward understanding that he has found his own freedom—a freedom from ideology.

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