
Alchemist Review

2008



Published by the University of Illinois at Springfield English Program,
the UIS English Club and the UIS Literati.
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Cover art by Emily Martin and Michael Gammon.
The Alchemist Review logo by Emily Martin and Michael Gammon.

*When you stare into the abyss
the abyss stares back at you.*

~ Frederich Nietzsche ~

acknowledgements

The editors and staff would like to extend their sincere gratitude to the following groups and individuals:

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for their generous financial contributions as well as the time and patience of their staff.

The English Department faculty and staff for their generous financial contributions and guidance.

The English Club and Literati for seeking contributors and reviewers, and for their financial contributions, moral support, advertising, and general assistance.

The Inter-Club Council Board for their generous financial contributions.

Dr. Livinus Odozor for his expert knowledge, advice, and moral support as the staff's faculty sponsor.

Dr. Sara Cordell for her faculty sponsorship of the English Club, her support, and guidance.

Campus Services at the University of Illinois at Springfield for their patience, expert knowledge, and services.

The Media Lab at the University of Illinois at Springfield for providing the equipment and space for the editorial staff to work and for permitting the sometimes talkative meetings that occurred within their facilities.

Without these groups and individuals, *The Alchemist Review* would not have been possible.

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message from the editor

Dear Reader,

I did not start this year planning to be involved in *The Alchemist Review*, let alone planning to be its editor, but life is full of surprises. Some surprises, like being the editor of *The Alchemist Review*, are more welcomed than others.

I have long believed that story is everything and everything is story. The world is comprised of stories. They explain who we are, where we have been, what we fear, what we believe, how we have evolved, and where we are going. They are in and around everything. Whether it is the etymology of a word, tracing its ancestry as people migrated across continents, conquering and merging with one another, or Caesar's last breath, mingling in the atmosphere and spreading across the world to be inhaled by others, generations later, every sound we hear, every molecule we breathe, has a story.

In this issue of *The Alchemist Review*, our writers and photographers hold a mirror up to society and culture and reflect our stories back at us. In so doing, they shine a light into the forgotten, neglected corners of humanity. As the editor, I am privileged to have worked with such talented individuals, many of whom are being published for the first time within these pages.

I am equally privileged to have been supported by a talented and dedicated staff. The members of the review panel provided feedback on all of the submissions, making the job of choosing which submissions to publish easy, and they never complained about tight deadlines. Emily Martin, this year's Design & Layout Editor, spent countless hours creating a template and editing the layout, even though she graduated halfway through the year. Julie Perino cheerfully picked up the slack wherever it was needed. Michael Gammon served not just as Assistant Editor but also as the journal's Business Manager. Without them, the 2008 issue of *The Alchemist Review* would not be the quality publication that it is.

I am happy that I had the opportunity to share this experience with everyone and I hope that you, the reader, enjoy the journey contained within these pages.

Best wishes,
Lori Basiewicz, Editor
The Alchemist Review (2008)





Untitled - Nathan Bennett

Preacher

By Gary Haddock

He ambles slowly down the street like he owns it, like he owns the sidewalk, the light posts, and the stoplights. His head is high, his step definite. He is in no hurry; there is no need to rush, he can take all the time he wants.

It is August and it is blazing hot, so hot mail carriers slow their pace to a near crawl, hot enough for men high on half-built buildings to slowly slip to the ground in search of shade when they cannot bear the heat a moment longer. Their hard hats are too hot to touch.

He wears a black raincoat that scrapes the ground. He sleeps in it, no matter how hot it is, no matter how cold it is. He wears one black shoe and a brown one that doesn't quite fit. His left foot aches but he doesn't take off his brown shoe at night. He sleeps with his feet tucked tight under his legs; he has woken up too many times with his shoes gone.

Everything he owns is in the pockets of his raincoat, his pants, his shirt. His gold cross is in a tan leather bag scrounged from a dumpster. He wears the bag around his neck. Last year on a Monday night on the October edge of cold, "Jack, no last name available" saw ten bucks on the front seat of an unlocked car, "found it," got drunk, and tried to take Preacher's bag. "Jack, no last name available" was in the hospital for weeks and never walked the same again.

On the street he is Preacher because he looks like Moses. He has a thick white fringe of hair ringing the middle of his bald head. He has a frost-white beard and mustache, his skin is charcoal black and he is tall and he does in fact look like a movie Moses. His sharp eyes miss nothing because he says little. He can quote word-for-word parts of the Bible that he likes; there are fewer of them now than when he was a passionate preacher and everyone knew his name, even in the white community. He was called sir and asked what he thought. He once gave a speech at a white Kiwanis club breakfast meeting and was asked questions afterwards. He lost his church when the choir director became pregnant and said the baby was his. He chose not to deny it and soon began drinking heavily.

"Jack, no last name available" is limp-walking in the opposite direction, his right leg always a little behind his left. He looks at Preacher like he is looking at a brick wall. Preacher wonders where his shopping cart is. "Jack, no last name available" is never without his shopping cart, overloaded with stuffed black garbage bags, dumpster debris hanging from its sides. Preacher wonders but does not ask.

At precisely five o'clock Preacher sits on the wooden street bench outside a busy bar that serves food until late at night. He does not ask for money. People give him a dollar, two dollars, sometimes five dollars, never more. Preacher never

says thank you. On a good day he can make a hundred dollars in a few hours. He can't remember how long it's been since he's had a good day.

Most people who see him there are vaguely threatened. Preacher knows by the way their eyes shift, how they look away, how their faces grow grim, how their bodies stiffen. Smokers who leave the bar for a quick cigarette turn their backs to him before they light up.

Bits of a Bible verse slowly shuffle into his memory:

"For I was hungry. . . I was thirsty. . . I was a stranger. . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

He sometimes preached that verse when he had a church, but he was never certain he believed it.



Watchful

By Lola L. Lucas

I glimpsed a shape on top
Of a light standard near White Oaks:
A surveillance camera, I thought,
But no, it was far older, the low-tech
Obsidian eye – just as watchful –
Of a crow.

Western Modernization: Overshadowing the Discourses of Women

By Sarah Elizabeth Quigley

Much discourse stems from cultural biases as well as misinterpretations pertaining to how others live their lives. Islamic and Confucian societies practice ancient traditions, sacred to the historical foundation of their beliefs, however these do not necessarily remain unchanging. The internal struggle to accept Western ideology or dismiss it raises the question whether or not to fight in order to protect tradition. This movement stirs much controversy concerning the threat of innovation into Eastern society because with the implementation of feminism comes Western Modernization. Discourse¹ about women deals less with women than it does about religious symbolism, educational reform, and gender roles, with the ultimate goal of thwarting attempts to incorporate Westernization into Islamic and Confucian society.

While many Colonial thinkers may have believed that Eastern culture remained stagnant in a constantly evolving world, they often failed to recognize the strides made in centuries past and present. In regards to Islam and Confucianism, adopting Western Imperialist ideals concerning the feminist movement threatened the mystical and most defining aspects of these respected religions. The campaign for feminism began in the 19th century as a Western movement for gender equality and quickly became a defining characteristic of Modernity. Islamists and Confucians rejected Western secularism and the banishment of religious values from most aspects of daily life. In this world view, rationalism and Enlightenment thought represent modern blasphemies as they dare to set Man up as equal to God. Western Colonialists viewed Islam as a peculiar, backward nation that needed guidance to reform their treatment of women (Ahmed, 149-150).

Religious symbols play an important role in defining Muslim and Confucian tradition. Footbinding² symbolized the self-imposed subjugation women suffered in order to maintain Confucian expectations of femininity. Radical Western feminists viewed footbinding as possibly the most excruciating self-imposed pain among Confucian women to maintain the societal standards of beauty (Ebrey, 39-43). The veil as used in Confucianism, as well as in Muslim

¹ Discourse is defined as reflecting and shaping our perception of reality.

² Footbinding, a practice beginning around the 11th century, inspired women to painfully bind their feet in order to become the soft, beautiful, and fragile wives men wanted them to be. It was an alteration of the body that changed their physical being, limiting all forms of exercise and forced women to be more delicate.

tradition, instigates controversy to modernity as well. The concept of the veil exemplifies the effect of misinterpretations made by Western civilizations reflecting Islam, igniting the dispute of its seemingly archaic and outdated presence. The Imperialists' view of the veil's purpose, to imprison women and serve as a constant reminder of inferiority, demonstrates a common fallacy about what it represents.

Leila Ahmed, author of *Women and Gender in Islam*, addresses this issue in her chapter, "The Discourse of the Veil," portraying some very controversial views of the veil's true purpose. She introduced the opinion of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an 18th century writer and traveler, who spoke up for Muslim practices. Montagu believed that many details, misconstrued by her Western colleagues through faulty translations in their travels, needed to be rectified. They could not understand the significance of the veil nor grasp the sanctity and integrity it represented. "She also said that having herself not only observed veiled women but also used the veil, she was able to assert that it was not the oppressive custom her compatriots believed it to be, noting in fact that it gave women a kind of liberty, for it enabled them not to be recognized" (Ebrey, 39-43). This statement supports the theory that Western views of religious symbols, in this instance the veil, consisted of flawed and misguided notions.

Many proponents in the discourse of the veil made unsupported generalizations regarding its true purpose seeking only to use women's suffrage as an excuse to impose Westernization into Eastern society. A prominent British Orientalist of his day, Stanley Lane-Poole makes an appearance in Ahmed's discourse as well. Lane-Poole held the view that Muslims' demeaning treatment of women would eventually lead to the destruction of Islam. Cromer, a British consul general, supported Lane-Poole's analysis, advocating women's rights in reference to veiling and segregation. He explained that this Oriental tradition encourages the degradation of females and, in this process, weakened the reasoning of the entire society.

It was essential to change the position of women in Islam, for it was Islam's degradation of women, expressed in practices of veiling and seclusion that was "the fatal obstacle" to the Egyptian's attainment of that elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of Western civilization (Ahmed, 153).

Ahmed relates to readers that Cromer's intentions proved to be hypocritical; in actuality, he believed that feminism should be resisted and suppressed at all costs. He sought to limit educational opportunities for women as the one-time president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Cromer is an example of how Western influence sought to impact Eastern society, using the concept of feminism as an excuse to impose their philosophy upon them. "For missionaries, as for Cromer, women were the key to converting backward Muslim societies into civilized Christian societies," says Ahmed (53).

Cromer, not alone in his opinion on education in the lives of women, hoped to influence Eastern societies to accept Western concepts of modernity through academics. *The Ideology of Good Wives and Wise Mothers*, written by Joan Judge, discusses the topic of educational reform through the perspectives of different authors. Jia Fengzhen, a Chinese journalist voiced his thoughts about the implementation of Japanese philosophies³ toward women saying, "The assumption that what is right for Japan is what is right for China and what is right for the West is not necessarily appropriate in Asia" (Judge, 227). The responsibilities of women to take care of their homes, their husband, and their children seemed too great of a task in addition to an education rivaling a man's.

Despite protests from conventional Chinese practices, during the 19th and 20th centuries, the country began to institute Japanese innovations into their culture. Originally inspired by the West, Japan served as an in-between, transitory society through which Chinese culture sought to improve upon the lives of its people through the imposition of Western notions about gender. Motivated by the West, particularly in the aspects of motherhood and marriage, women sought to receive an education. They hoped not only to improve their own minds, but to allow them to properly educate their children as well. Innovations of other cultures slowly morphed the expectations of a Chinese woman during that time period, incorporating the cultivation of the mind into their mannerisms.

Shimoda Utako, a woman who advocated education to promote good wives and good mothers, visited the west and returned to China with a new understanding of what needed accomplishing to improve Asia; it must be strengthened through education. She said that female instruction should mirror the same coursework as that of males, in order to conquer Western imperialism and to make strong the weak nation of China (Judge, 227). These innovations caught on when, in 1904, young Chinese women were sent to Japan to continue their studies. Still, these enhancements could not satisfy the movement for women's education. Chen Yiyi, a Chinese scholar and advocate for female equality, questioned the purpose of simply improving the roles of women into better wives and mothers. According to Yiyi, this low level of education simply created high-level slaves and literate maids. He asserted that, "Males and females are both members of humankind and therefore should receive the same education" (Judge, 241). Modern approaches to education stressed that women deserved the privilege to learn just as much as men; however the traditional gender roles in Eastern society make such innovations a difficult task to accomplish while still upholding Confucian values.

Accepting Western infiltration invites chaos into the order of gender roles in Islam and Confucianism. Each stressed the private sphere in relation to

³ Japan was quickly becoming known for the educational opportunities available to women, adopting the standards of the West, forged ahead with gender equality in education.

women and the public sphere in relation to men, sharing the belief that men and women performed certain duties in society. Not necessarily equal, but different, the tasks of males and females seemed to compliment each other as demonstrated in the concept of yin and yang⁴. According to Patricia Ebrey in *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, the husband did not discuss matters of the home and the wife never mentioned public affairs. "The concept of keeping men and women physically apart was extended analogically to encompass separation of function and differentiation of behavior" (Ebrey, 24). The standards these religions abide by concerning gender roles in the social order is incomparable to others. Such principles should not be interpreted as black and white, good or evil, but instead be properly investigated and viewed interdisciplinarily as a way of life, different from Western Imperialism, but not necessarily outdated.

Islam and Confucianism, in short, can not be defined as more or less pro- or anti- modernity than Western civilization. Ahmed delivers this message saying, "That women's words have weight, even concerning matters of spiritual and social import, continued to be a feature of the Muslim community in the years immediately following Muhammad's death, as is clearly demonstrated by the acceptance of women's contributions to the *hadith*" (Ahmed, 72). Indeed, some scholars argue that Islam and Confucianism actively encourage reason and free will more enthusiastically and openly than either Christianity or Judaism. Far from abhorring individualism, Islam and Confucianism have allowed and even have encouraged women to seek their own path to redemption. The central argument in such discourses does not strictly revolve around women's rights, but instead has become overshadowed by the transformation that accompanied these ideas.

⁴ Women were "yin" (dark, passive, female) and men were "yang" (bright, assertive, male).



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Compass Rose

By Jim Stephens

She came and held me
a small heart on a chain
warm against her body
wrapped up in exhaustion
leather jacket
shining x
making love might tremble with every breath
but it will never be a solution.
"Some I felt all the way to my heart," she said,
"and some didn't mean a thing.
The sweat dries, the night goes, and it ain't any less so.
There are things about me no one knows."
Compass rose and silver cross,
written over her heart.
She says they're for when she's lost.
"We make it to thirty, then we start going crazy –
every second generation of my family.
Still, everybody blames me.
And I don't understand.
Why can't I stop it with these hands,
when I can give you warmth with just a touch?
All I want is the freedom to be free enough to do these things
and stop living for all that scares me so.
There are things about me no one knows."

Mezcal

By Mary Colligan

Nothing follows us into the dusty palm of desert night, into the slowly opening fist where scorpions emerge to watch the unfurling darkness. Like a pitiful child life stands on the highway by the gravel road that turns off into this waste; stranded, eyes wide and empty, never forgetting, at the place where the man and I turn and dip into the dry valley. I can feel the eyes on my back, the desperate eyes past weeping that stare while my gold Camaro drives us away. Smiling bitterly through its headlights the car turns from the staring eyes; nothing ever follows us when we come out to the desert.

We come here Friday nights when he gets off from the base, after he comes to the tavern where I see him walk in tall with salty trails of sweat on his temples, the bristling black hairs of his forearms gritty with sand and his hands creased orange with dirt. We meet in the tavern and drink mezcal, golden and hot as desert noon, and I smile as he tries every time to out drink me, to keep his head from falling back onto the cracked plastic seat of the booth. I swirl the scorpion on the bottom of the bottle and look at the man through the golden liquid, look at his strong arms and the insignia on his shirt, at the cords of his strong neck, the square jaw, the half-open eyes that multiply across his face through the distorting lens of the bottle. I look at him through the scorpion, through the hot gold, tipping the bottle up, finishing the last of it while people laugh because this is how long it has taken for me to become beautiful: two bottles of mezcal, one for me and one for him. So I get up and pull him along by the arm into the dark night and let them laugh while I lead him to my gold Camaro.

We get in my car and I fly him down the highway. It is always late, very late, and through my open window the desert night snows stars on a dry, choking wind, with only me to watch them fall and drift along the endless road. He sits next to me, sliding his hand along my legs, groping, burying his face in the dry, bleached hair that sticks to my neck, brittle as hay, scorched by the sun and chemicals, straight, unbending, split and frazzled. I rub my cheek against him and open to his reach, press down harder on the gas, and hurry to the desert. The earth shivers under my tires, my heart races with a desperate eagerness as he licks my skin and bites; stars shoot past us, faster and faster, faster and faster as I enter the dark tunnel of the sky and hurry to the gravel road.

I turn the wheel hard, turn the key that tumbles the lock of the cage and opens the door for the animal, the nocturnal animal that is terrified of the day, of the devouring beasts of the day. My tires skid and then we rock back and forth, back and forth over the rough road that is invisible in the darkness, a black cave closing in about us, dark hands that cup us. I take my foot from the pedal and like magic the car journeys us through the cavernous desert, a slow, bumping journey

over the potholes, always to the same place with the shallow slopes of distant mountains rising to our left, partially born, just the tips of a fork that puncture the surface of the dark earth from below. He is laughing, taking off his shirt, pulling at mine, refusing to wait, and I lay back my head and wait, driving blind, closing my eyes so that I may gush out in a streak into the sky, into the stars, into the fertile milk of the stars.

He is the one who reaches over to turn off the engine, and that is when I open my eyes and my Camaro stops. There is a blanket on the back seat that we throw on the sand. In his eagerness to have me before he passes out I am on the ground with the stars orbiting about me, watching them spin over his shoulder, watching them spin on the fierce whorls of his breath. They are caught up in the black fluid of darkness that flows beneath our blanket and rides us through the heavy weight of night, and like the stars, we surge deeper into the darkness, the sweet darkness. It enters me, fills me, overwhelms me, the night and the stars and the fingers of the wilderness, until he cries out a word that is swallowed up as soon as it is spoken. "God," he says, and falls away.

The air is cold, but he doesn't feel it. He passes out and misses it every time, misses the embracing silence, the dark, and the fantastic emptiness of the night that presses down as we lie on the blanket. I pull the edges over us to keep us warm and let silence speak, let darkness stare, let emptiness rub up against me like a lonely cat. The whole desert night revolves around me as I hurtle with sickening speed, as I fly down a vortex until I must close my eyes. I swim through the wastes, pulled by strange forces; by the magnetic tug of the bodies in the sky, pressing myself against one and then another in the hope that I will be let in, that there will be a way to get inside so that I may divide, that I may divide and grow and finally be born into golden arms.

Sometimes I look down at them as they lay there: a man, young and tan and dark, muscular from work, hard; and a woman. I stare at her for eternities, wondering at her, unable to keep from staring despite my fear, my dread of her, skinny and terrifying, lips pressed tightly together and disappearing without their lipstick, frightening eyes pinched closed and leaking with black streaks of mascara, black as the night, and still I look even though I know that if her eyes open I will see what she sees. I put out my hand to touch her, to caress the thin limbs, to trace the tips of my fingers over her wasted body, to cup her face and stare at the closed eyes; put a vision into her eyes of the respite of the desert night. But the stars pull me away and I am lost among them, thoughtless, mindless, and painless. Until he wakes up and urinates, irritably stumbles back to the car, and wrenches me from the heavens with the merciless sting of a shout.

I can see his head in the passenger's seat, but I do not know his name. I have never asked his name, and he has never asked mine. We will never ask. The car and his head are just shadows against the dimly lit horizon of the East: dark forms against dismal gray, nothing. Everything pours out of me as I watch

him, down the insides of my thighs, everything, all the dust of the night, all the peaks of silver light, so I stretch out my hand in front of me until the Camaro disappears behind it. I will turn into a statue, into one of the carved pillars of stone that decorate the pebbled wasteland, feet in the sand, my hand in front of my face so that I can see nothing, nothing but the hand that keeps everything away, everything but the stars that have retreated into the sterility of a threatening dawn, and the stare that seeks me out from the highway. It is always so hard to go back. It is always so hard to leave the stars and the desert, and to go back to the gray stare of the highway, but it never stops staring, it never shuts its eyes. "Let's go," he shouts, and I find that I can still move.

At the corner of the gravel road and the highway I always cry, but he is sleeping again, snoring next to me as I weep. The tears blind me and I resist the golden line that reaches into the Camaro from the road to lasso me and pull me toward the town. I sway to the left and to the right of the noose that draws me back whenever my tires drift onto the gravel, that pulls tightly when I fall into the ditch, pulls at my neck but never chokes me completely. I gag. I vomit out the window. It pulls hard and snaps me awake. The night I struck the little fox it snapped me awake and uncoiled from my throat with the silkiness of a python so that I could see what I had done. I stopped the car and there she lay on the road, the fox, twitching slightly and staring at me with unblinking eyes, the fading stars of the desert night paling from her eyes, a dead rabbit in her mouth... food for her babies in her mouth. The venom of it shot into my veins and I fell to the ground.

I close my eyes as I pass the terrible spot, squeeze them tight and roar past the awful place, screaming with my mouth wide open but no sound coming out so that I cannot think the things that kill me, so that the fire injected in my veins will stop burning. The rear-view mirror panics me and I turn it away, groaning at the scratching and tearing inside me, the scratching and tearing of the animal, rending my soul, devouring my heart. Soon I'll be in town, soon, I always tell myself, and stare at the golden line so that I cannot see what lies poor and abandoned in the dark, empty den, curled up in the den and waiting for life to come, not knowing that nothing will ever come, not ever again. Only night hears me sob and stops to look back, only darkness feels the stars fall from my frightening eyes and reaches through my window to catch them before it must go.

I don't know that I am in town until he leans over and shakes me. He gets out of the car and puts on his shirt that stinks of the cigarettes we smoked, of the tavern, of mezcal. He never says goodbye, or kisses me, or whispers, "I'll see you next week." I do not care, and I do not watch him leave, I just grip the wheel and squint at the yellow hood of the car that reflects a bold sun, like a fist raised above me. The door slams and I spin my Camaro into reverse and fly back down the road into the numbing glare of day, to begin everything again, to do everything the same all over again, to go back to the tavern on Friday night and order my bottle of mezcal and to wait for him to walk in again, to offer him a drink again, to

discover again that he does not remember me, and to savor the deliberate reprieve of his forgetfulness. Again, on Friday night, we will drink mezcal and forget. Forget what we have deserted, forget what we have put from us and denied, and forget what stands on the edge of the desert road and stares with empty eyes that never close.





Misty Noelle - Nathan Bennett

Reflections of God (Depressed in January's Hospital)

By Thomas E Webb

I see everything God knows about me
through barred windows as chemicals about-
face. The way minor key melodies still know
harmony, I know all men will play God
and trick chances to treat me with something.
But they'll never take the time to see
the way that still oceans darken, tossed seas
shift floors, and treasures bury deep within me.
King James's sailors knew, if anything,
that tangles of sweat streams, extended bouts
of suffering, meant more sweet dreams of God's
grace safely guiding them to port. There's no
use telling doctors, "God saves," when I know
they only put faith in drugs that can seize
the thoughts of men, and in turn, render God
a wisp of air or silent dream. For me,
drugs done aren't enough to forget about
the thoughts of death that swirl, surround – something
so consuming that sorry sights of things
I once confessed cadences to can no
longer compete with suicidal bouts.
Through barred hospital hall windows, I see
friends trek slick parking lots to visit me,
solemn eyes that look past the snows to God
echo prayers of delivery. It's God's
power only to control cursed things
that eat away life deep inside of me;
and yet, doubting Doctors pretend to know
it all, match prescription to what they see.
There's no quick fix; they know nothing about
healing. Even my friends – who fight about
how we could let such spoiled sons of God
worship their false ideals – will fail to see
how trees claiming "knowledge of everything"
weighed us down with its rotting fruits.

No friends, no doctors, can fix what drains in me,
when I know what's wrong with me is everything
I see through banned hall windows – when I know
I see everything God knows about me.

Just Be Black!

By Nyisha Johnson

First of all, it's being 9 years old and realizing you don't belong
amongst your people.

It's, "talking white," and "acting white"

Or so I've heard:

It's, being ignored and misunderstood by your own people.

It's, trying to, "talk how blacks talk,"

"It's, trying to act how blacks act,"

What the fuck is that, "talking black, and acting black"

Who told you shit like that?

I've never heard of this!

Not my mother, nor dad.

I've never been told that!

It's being told to "talk proper, act sophisticated."

It's being told to not limit your vocabulary to

SHIT, FUCK, and BITCH.

It's being told to act like you have some sense and not

GHETTO.

It's being told to tell the teacher when someone is picking on you
instead of getting greased up.

It's being told to call the polices when the neighborhood boy steals your bike,
Instead of calling Uncle Pookie and them.

Why is it important to "talk black, and act black..."

HELL JUST BE BLACK!!!!

WHAT the FUCK is that?

WHO told You SHIT like that?

Streets That Run East/West in Chicago

By Thomas E Webb

I got nothing from the beauty of her sunrise

as it peeked early
slipped in and out of curtains
landed
parallel with the blankets pulled to my eyes
and forced me awake

awake just in time to watch

gravity's push and pull on her body
as it found tunnels in her broken curls
as she stood to dress in a hurry
to beat the traffic
that clogs Chicago side streets on a workday

I got nothing but a used bed
stale sheets
and a new entry for the day's list:

laundry

I got nothing from the beauty of her sunrise

not even a fast breakfast

no steamy rich flavor for my lips
no swimming liquid wrapped around my tongue
no play for my mouth to swallow

not even a shared bowl of morning melon
half for her
half for me
pulled on gently with fingers
until fruity flesh loosens the grind
and splits from its station

no juices sprung
to fill the slips of my fingerprints
and save a sticky film
that would remind me of her
all day long

I got nothing but the dream of her
descending three flights
as the sun began its arch over the city.

The Retelling of the Persephone Myth in American Romanticism

By Curt Meyer

Anthropologist Rachel Pollack raises the questions in her work *The Body of the Goddess*: "Was the true identity of Persephone's 'ravisher' part of the secret at the end of the Mysteries? ... Could this revelation have included the knowledge of a sacred marriage in the Land of the Dead between the Goddess of Life and the God of Ecstasy?" (218). Those American Romantics, who by metaphorically retelling the myth of Persephone's marriage have initiated themselves into her Mysteries, offer both negative and affirmative responses to Pollack's questions. Washington Irving, in his "Rip Van Winkle", adheres to convention casting Hades as the ravisher while Emily Dickinson delivers a tale more to Pollack's liking with her poem 712, "Because I could not stop for Death." By acquiescing to Dickinson's speaker, the stand-in for Persephone, Death reveals his identity as Dionysus, the "God of Ecstasy," in her poem. In casting Death as Dionysus, both Dickinson and Pollack celebrate the feminine¹. Walt Whitman's homoerotic retelling in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" complements Dickinson's. Wallace Stevens echoes the two previous poets' embrace of ecstatic death with his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" is a homoerotic retelling of the conventional Hades and Persephone pairing in which the female has been all but written out, allowing only for the primacy of the male psyche.

Dame Van Winkle exemplifies the classic agrarian earth cult. In sharp contrast to Rip, she is invested in the working of the land for her family's economic survival, but Rip, not his wife, curries favor with the people of the village because she wields a weapon against him almost too horrible to contemplate: language, the use of which has typically been mastered by her sky cult rivals like "junto," the congress of men around the tree, in their talks about nothing. Dame Van Winkle proves her rhetorical mastery in her ability to silence even Nicholas Vedder, himself a figure for the vapor clad Katskill Mountains and the Olympian gods who reside on them by virtue of metaphor, with "fragrant vapor curl[ing] about his nose" (940). This capacity of her tongue to move mountains, or more

¹ Pollack bases the theories primarily on her interpretation of images on surviving ancient art: "...an archaic vase painting shows Persephone and Dionysus in a pose which suggests marriage (Dionysus holds out a cup to Her) while Demeter and Hermes look on from the side" (218).

poignantly to castrate even the most virile of men, thrusts her into the realm of gender ambiguity. She is dark Hecate, the medusa, both Scylla and Charybdis; she is a threat to brimming flagons and freedom-loving democracy.

If Dame Van Winkle is the bane of male desire, then Rip is its object. He is, before his sleep, the Western eye's beautiful young man and awakens as the pontificating sage. The affection that young women and children have for him casts Rip as Michelangelo's David, the pastoral boy-king. Rip, however, defines his identity in a theatre absent of women, underneath the great tree as Vedder's devotee. Here Rip sucks the chiding "short, frequent and angry puffs" from the patriarch's pipe in this would be satirical symposium. The narrator, for fear of Calvinist reprisal no doubt, has replaced semen with smoke. Rip cannot himself ascend to the height of sage-god without first vanquishing any opposition that might bind him to a less lofty dialectic, but the beautiful young man cannot dirty his hands with such things. So what is a sympathetic narrator to do but to write the opposition out of his narrative?

To rid the tale of Dame Van Winkle and to preserve Rip's progression from beautiful young man to sage-god, the narrator relates a revisionist version of the Persephone myth without the goddess. Rip himself replaces Persephone as the object of desire. The revised myth begins as Rip seeks solace from his wife in the bosom of his mistress, the woods. Although the natural scene depicted in the narrative is clearly feminine with the stretch of the Hudson River and the surrounding area providing a metaphorical birth canal, it is nature lorded over by the watchful eye of Hendrick Hudson and by approving benedictions from the sky gods in the form of "transient thunderstorms" (941). This scene is an acceptable mistress because she has no "edge tool" with which to castrate Rip (939). In the revisionist myth, Hades does not abduct Rip to the underworld, but rather; as Hudson, a figure who derives mythic power by conquering the feminine through the inscription of his name upon the river, lures him there. Hecate is not present to witness this descent. If a rape occurs in this tale, it is the absence of the embodied Dark Mother. Dame Van Winkle is reduced to a fading, disembodied voice. Here the pomegranate has been replaced with a flagon of liquor and the underworld itself with an amphitheatre. The scene described is a homoerotic bacchanalia complete. One need not explore all of the phallic implications of the perpetual game of ninepins to understand this point. Rip's gun's dilapidated state upon his awakening offers him his first sign of the death of his henpecked role. The "cawing of a flock of idle crows" is both one of the only traces that remain of the dark goddess, the voice of Dame Van Winkle, and a subverted vision of the dismembered Dionysus (943). Paglia confirms that "Dionysus liberates by destroying. He is not pleasure but pleasure-pain, the tormenting bondage of our life and body. For each gift he exacts a price. Dionysian orgy ended in mutilation and dismemberment" (94). Dame Van Winkle pays for her agency with her life. The dark goddess and the god of ecstasy cannot

triumph in this theater of male fantasy. Rip will no longer require the comfort of bullets piercing game. The champion of the Sun will realize his masculine ideal in the See of Nicholas Vedder among the town patriarchs.

Upon Rip's return to the village he is Odysseus in his arrival at Ithaca after twenty years minus the trials. Rip has slept through the violent revolution, and the worst monster of all has died of natural causes. Rip will not be obligated to an aging woman like the Greek returning hero. Rip, rather, will be free to offer himself as an object for the affections of young men rising in their generations. Odysseus does, however, find one friend in someone that Rip does not: his dog. Dame Van Winkle bares her teeth for the final time as the aged Wolf. The dog has become his namesake. Despite his ill treatment at the hands of Dame Van Winkle in his younger years as Rip's companion, Wolf like his mistress is permanently yoked to nature by virtue of his physiology. He lacks the intellectual and verbal capacities to wield language, and to therefore overcome the inertia of nature, and she, as a woman, could not escape the progression of her menstrual cycle which would not allow her the transience necessary for a complete divorce from nature, regardless of her rhetorical prowess. The narrator includes Rip's unhappy reunion with his dog to emphasize to the male psyche that nature is not to be trusted.

Rip ensures the victory of the masculine over the feminine with the pronouncement of the name "Nicholas Vedder" at the refurbished inn. The deceased pontiff's name sparks the people's interest in the tattered Rip and positions him as the former man's successor. Rip's advent on Election Day crowns the fantasy. He arrives at the opportune time to reap the benefits of the junto's philosophizing. (The war that also resulted from it was of no consequence to Rip. One cannot be held responsible for what others do while one is asleep). The liberty pole in place of the great tree and General Washington's colors on King George coupled with the same political discussions about the new republic show that dialectics do not necessarily change with aesthetics. Rip quickly masters the new signifiers for his old signifieds. The welcoming arms of Rip's daughter mark his final trump of Dame Van Winkle and of the feminine psyche itself. In male fantasy, the daughter has no choice but to be seeped in Freudian fascination of her father. He is a successful parent without having lifted a finger to nurture her.

The narrator appends the tale to ensure his male audience that the salvation of the henpecked husband is, in fact, possible along the banks of the Hudson. As Persephone redeems the lives of growing things with the end of winter, so Rip Wan Winkle redeems the hopes of those condemned to toil rather than drink, smoke and philosophize.

Irving, then, reveals himself in his retelling of the myth not as a disciple of Dionysus, but rather of Dionysius the Agreopagite, whose works, as Bakhtin points out, "contain a complete and consistent development of the idea of hierarchy" (401). Paglia writes of Irving's genre: Fable is marshmallow myth; it is myth stripped of chthonian realities. Scratch a fabulist, and you'll find fear of

woman and of nature. Storytelling or yarn-spinning is what men do among men. It is a ritual of avoidance, a deflection of the psychological turbulence of men's lives with women. ... Romanticism is in its degenerate late phase. Dark, sexual songs of experience are the authentic Late Romantic voice (622).

Dionysus, in sharp contrast to his namesake, "leveling the great chain of being respects no hierarchy" (Paglia 95). He "melts the west's armoured ego in moral and sexual ambivalence" (Paglia 104). By emphasizing the myth's chthonian, or Dionysian, realities in their retellings, as previously stated Late American Romantics particularly Dickinson, Whitman, and Stevens, embrace death and the feminine.

Emily Dickinson identifies herself as a Maenadic priestess of ecstasy with her tribute to the wine god, "Because I could not stop for Death." Here her speaker clearly plays the role of Persephone in her decent into the underworld. Death's "kind stop" in the second line reveals his visit not as an abduction, but as a courtship "[knowing] no haste" (5). He will port her to his realm only on her terms. In sharp departure from Irving's retelling, the goddess not only witnesses the courtship, she is present in the coach as "Immortality" (3). She guides the lovers into "A swelling of the Ground" (18). Paglia comments: "Dionysus, god of fluids, rules a murky no man's land of matter half-turned to liquid. ... Dionysus, endorsing woman, also keeps her in the chthonian swamp" (93). The "chthonian swamp" to which Paglia attaches a slightly negative connotation is the Dark Mother's womb "choked with menstrual albumen, the lukewarm matrix of nature teeming with algae and bacteria" (Paglia, 92). Paglia discounts the matrix of possibility that this "matrix of nature" that Dickinson does not. Her speaker "put[s] away / [her] labor and [her] leisure," and the restrictions on feminine power that accompany them, in favor of Death's "Civility" (6-8). The term "Civility" here sarcastically implies a sexual union, the offering of the pomegranate urged by "Children [striving] / At Recess—in the Ring" (9-10). That "Ring" is an emblem of the vagina and of Dionysus himself. Paglia writes that "Dionysus, with his Maenadic night rites, is the body as internal womb-space, tunneled for eating and procreating" (105). This death god's transgendered qualities allow him to transverse the realm of Earth and the underworld, day and night. Persephone's mother Demeter surveys her daughter's procession with approval as "Fields of Gazing Grain" (11). The passage of the sun, and the activities of the patriarchy are of no consequence to Dickinson's speaker and her Dionysus.

Dickinson's depiction of her speaker's coach ride bears striking resemblance to Walt Whitman's description of Lincoln's ride to his second inauguration in *Specimen Days*: "The President rode very quietly down to the Capitol in his own carriage, by himself..." (90). The customary escorts are absent here. A disembodied Death courts the President. In recording this site, Whitman plays the role of Hecate, one he will exchange for that of Dionysus in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Here Whitman casts the Lincoln's corpse

as Persephone, exchanging the coach for a coffin. Whitman feminizes, and therefore immortalizes, the fallen President with his comparison of him to the “Western Orb,” or the star Venus. Accompanying Whitman on this journey toward internment is his doppelganger, “liquid and free tender,” a brown thrush (104). The bird’s song cants the true identity of Death an “outlet song of life,” both “sane” and “sacred,” as Dionysus (24; 59). The fluid nature of Whitman’s and the bird’s “glad serenades” to both Lincoln and the Dark Mother suggest oral copulation (143). Paglia contends that all oral sex may be related to bacchanalia: “There may be an element of omophagy in all oral sex, a mystic ritual, reverent and sadistic” (95). Pollack implies likewise that oral sex may be a ritual enactment of the marriage of Persephone and Dionysus: “When Persephone eats the [pomegranate] seed, she is eating Dionysus’s seed, that is, his sperm” (208). Here again, Demeter stands in approval of the match as “Yellow-spear’d wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark brown fields uprisen” (29). The “spear’d, uprisen” metaphor for the mother goddess emphasizes the power of the feminine in the poem as well as the Dionysian poet’s capacity to transverse gender norms. Whitman isn’t “blowing smoke” with his homoerotica like Irving. “The staffs all splintered and broken” in stanza fifteen also act as a transgender metaphor. Images of Dionysus are often only identified as male by the beard. Paglia reveals that, “A woman putting on men’s clothes merely steals social power. But a man putting on women’s clothes is searching for God” (90). Whitman thus has deified Lincoln in casting him as Persephone.

Whitman’s alter ego, the brown thrush, is himself somewhat of a transvestite. He exchanges his brown feathers for black, a color much better suited to the god of the underworld, in Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.” The number thirteen in the title suggests a dedication to the dark mother Hecate as it corresponds to the number of lunar months; however, two stanzas, 7 and 11, are particularly interesting in their references to the Persephone myth. In stanza seven, the speaker bids his listeners to reject the imagined golden birds of the fabulists. He asks who will listen to “see how the blackbird /Walks around the feet /Of the women about [them]” (27-29). This blackbird is the former thrush wooing his would be Persephones. Stanza 11 offers yet another retelling of the myth:

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds. (42-47).

The “glass coach” symbolizes the passengers’ openness to a sexual union with

Death, but this would be Persephone mistaking Dionysus's piercing of liberation for Hades's piercing of destruction. The god leaves him with only a shadow of his dismembered, all encompassing body. Stevens' rendering of the myth is a parable preparing his listeners for the arrival of ecstasy.

American Romanticism, then, offers two distinct answers to Pollack's question and with them two distinct retellings of the Persephone myth. The Irving model rejects the feminine by casting Hades as the "ravisher." The Dickinson model, however, supported by Whitman and Stevens, celebrate the feminine with metaphorical affirmation for Pollack's claim to Dionysus as Persephone's true consort.



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THE CAMP JOKE

By Petr Novak

Escape story? Let me tell you... wading rivers, backpacks in garbage bags, children tied on laundry lines. One man constructing a balloon – the wife sewing raincoats together for a year – flies them across the border, being shot at like pheasants.

"We took a bus," she says. Thank god the boy gets sick on public transportation. He sits on a bench outside the border station getting fresh air and doesn't have to watch the search. The interrogations. What humiliation. Those border guards were animals. I sent them a postcard from Venice. In this I wrote "God doesn't ride a horse but he'll catch any son of a bitch."

So these are stories of the ones who made it. And the ones who didn't? That were shot and crawled under bushes wounded? They were eventually found and spent years under a crushing jailer's boot. Those stories would be told much later.

"So the tour bus is to the city of Split. You know it? It sits couple of hundred kilometers south of Rieka." Yes, they know it. This is Yugoslavia old style, still in the spirit of Tito, this being the early eighties, before it is torn up; bombed to hell; divided up.

Ah, the pebble beaches of the Adriatic. The azure waters. "And anyway, we tell everybody on the tour we take a day trip. Up north, to Rieka. Only for a day or two. See the sights. Bullshit them. Anyone is a potential plant. Then what? I announce, 'One small bag, easier to jump the border with.' They haul you back home. Who knows how? Who cares? Don't need shit like this in my head for certain." She talks, they nod; smile their wine-laced smile. Of course. Isn't her story a minutely alternate version of their own?

"Well let me tell you about the expedition we took to the Himalayas once..." another says. Everybody laughs. How absurd. How wonderful; and he tells it and then on to a song. All of them forgetting to be nervous about the future; absolutely foreign, up ahead somewhere. For a while, they forget as they sing.

In the wee hours somebody is bound to get philosophical. "Absurd? What is this we've got our selves into? Definitely not beyond us. Strange, yes. But reachable for certain. Anyway, I will tell you absurd:

Two submarines are sitting in a tree knitting. One is sulking, and the other is trying to cheer her up. 'Look, there's an elephant flying by,' the happy submarine says. 'So what. Let it fly,' the sullen submarine says. They keep knitting. Minutes go by. The cheery submarine says to the sulking submarine,

'Look, look at those two elephants flying by,' but the sulking submarine just grunts and says, 'I don't care,' and they keep knitting. Several minutes after, the cheery submarine points into the sky and yelps with joy, 'Look, look, look at those three elephants flying by,' and this time the sullen submarine has enough: snaps, 'So what? Don't you see? They probably have a nest around here somewhere.'"

So in the camp, this one is a riot.





Chicago Bean - Nathan Bennett

A Counselor's Reservations

By Lola L. Lucas

The road to the White Dove of the Desert
Near Tucson is soiled by tarpaper shacks,
Third World poverty, you'd really think
Someone would pay to tear them down,
Crusted sores on the perfect lips
Of architecture.

At that, they beat lean-tos of corrugated tin,
Scant warmth through Dakota winters.
People inside them warm their fingers
On 80-proof antifreeze, the type
That comes in small glass bottles
Seen behind the counter
At convenience stores.

The guy across my desk is white
And well-fed. "Is 1/16 Indian enough
To qualify for grants? You know,
Get some of that casino money."
Amazing. It just doesn't end.
I'm supposed to help him but it'd be fair
To say, I have my reservations.

Yemaya

By Lucy Marrero

Tiny waves slap the sand like a newborn's
Aimless fist, clenched tight and harmless
The vastness of the ocean inconceivable
In the gentle tide, Tsunamis
The wicked witch of fairytales.

I hold deep secrets of life created
Hearts pulsing in darkness
Lava the hot sun of the undersea planet

Here the earth shifts under my feet,
Rocks whole continents and topples reaching towers.
I devastate greedy empires and abort
Transnational trade.

Cities fall to their knees in my pooled waters
Rising in their streets. Pencil points of land break off
And float away to birth new nations.

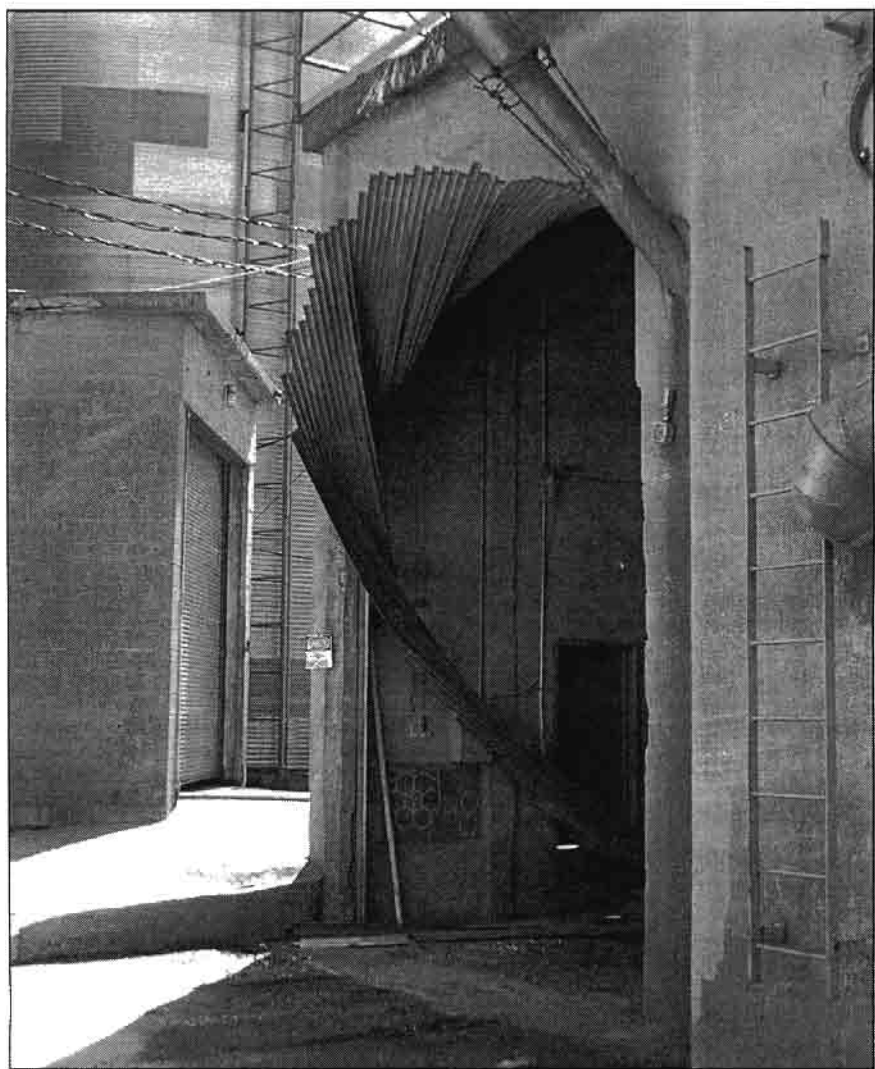
I am ancient waters and new life.

I leave you gifts in the sand
That you dig out with sticks and plastic shovels
A pebble-sized spiraling shell, seaweed draped around driftwood
Like a wedding dress.

You toss aside discarded bottle caps and Styrofoam crumbs
That masquerade as marine treasures.

You leave me gifts of oil spills and fishing line
I cannot untangle from my hair.
Ships as great as cities trail excrement through lucid waters
The dead bodies of my children float behind them.

Once you floated inside me, cocooned inside the expanding ocean
Of your mother's belly. Your natal fins gave way
To feet planted on dry soil. You walked away
And forgot me.



Mother Nature's Destructive Art - Jeremy Wilburn

Gargoyle

By Caron Tate

When I rounded the corner, the group of children playing there scattered like a handful of flung marbles – if marbles could scream.

Yes, I'll admit it. I enjoyed it every time it happened. And I didn't care if it was my height or my hooves or my wings. And as always, I reserved a trick or two for that one brave little toughie who could not be frightened. When I extended my wings and tentacles and bared my teeth (though I'm thinking "fangs" would be a more accurate description these days), each one discovered that while he could not be frightened, he could most certainly be terrorized.

But I do more with my time than frighten the young and helpless, I also frighten the old and helpless. No, a joke, though like all good jokes it has its kernel of truth.

I am the heir apparent to the Ndoley fortune. You know of us, of course. If you are over twelve and have teeth, you've heard of Realteeth™. You may have a few. You may have even studied the theory in a science class or my father's accomplishments in a business class. You've read how one of his Research and Development employees (who died, I hear in the occasional unguarded whisper, under rather suspicious circumstances) accidentally created a teeth bonding polymer that had one singular quality that none of the others did: It not only bonded with living teeth, it became teeth. Under any scrutiny but that of the most powerful microscope, the Realteeth material appeared to have actually transformed into a product of a living human body. Even experienced dentists closely scanning x-rays could not distinguish the point where a human tooth ended and the Realteeth bond began.

It wasn't long before another scientist discovered that the Realteeth technology worked equally well on bones. He was not in the employ of Ndoley Industries, but since he used our data as a starting point, my father and the company felt, quite rightly, that we were entitled to partial ownership - or at least a portion of any sales. He was gearing up for a heroic legal battle when the accident happened. His heirs settled without a fuss. Clearly, they saw the justice of our position too. Yes, more rumors, more innuendo, but that's the kind of thing one learns to live with in that land that exists above a certain income strata.

I wasn't the first to engage in Self-Design. Who hasn't lost weight, dyed hair, put on makeup, or worked out to achieve the body they desired? There was a rash of television shows many years ago about surgically and cosmetically changing the way people looked. But they almost always wanted to look more human. More acceptable to humans.

We suffer from no such restraints. I say “we” without feeling as if I were part of a group, but it seems, whether I wish to be or not, that I am.

I was like most teens: rebellious, inquisitive, always searching for the “real” me. We all dressed to shock and impress, did our hair to shock and impress, played sports, sang, created art, talked loud, stole, destroyed property – hoping to be noticed, to be idolized, to be remembered.

Despite our station in life, my brother and I were typical teens – he, the typical popular athlete; I, the typical ignored outcast. I had as much to overcome as any poor teen. Wealthy or not, what boy doesn’t understand how it would feel to have a father who’s like a god and an older brother who’s like the Son of God? And then there’s you. Awkward, unpopular, shorter, uglier, dumber. Not good enough.

We had different mothers, you see. His was the gorgeous model, the international playgirl who decided to play with my rich, less attractive father, but only for a little while. He loved her even after she abandoned him, but that did not stop him from taking her only son and keeping him away from her for the rest of her life. When she died, the gossips called it a broken heart; my father declared it the kind of end best suited to a “whoring junkie.”

So my mother was the safe one: the plain, quiet, plump, yet elegant, rock on which he built his home. She never complained, never questioned, never once considered demanding more time, or attention, or perhaps a little love.

And the two of us, my brother and I, we knew. We knew who and what our father was and where we fit into his world. And as with our mothers, he worshipped number one and ignored number two. And unlike our mothers, number one son stayed and blossomed and reveled in his position as “most beloved,” and number two demanded everything that should have been mine. And yes, I complained, I questioned, I refused to be ignored.

But despite my efforts, my father, for the most part, did manage to ignore me. A petty crime arrest here and there, the occasional detention or short suspension from school: All these managed to do was make my mother cry. No, not because she was disappointed in me, not because she was angry with me, but because he held her responsible.

He had a look, such a look, that surely if he chose to turn it on a field of newly sprouted wheat, it would shrivel and die right then with no further pretensions nor possibilities for life. He turned that look on my mother only a few times, but it was enough. I stopped trying to get his attention. Then I discovered Self-Design.

There were no Jacksonians then, no movement, only a handful of people on the fringes of society who wanted, who needed, to look different, to become less like everyone else and more like themselves.

Perhaps if I had not broken my leg, I might never have begun the process. I don't know.

My brother and I were in yet another of our endless competitions. I never won, but I continued to strive. He beat me at basketball, swimming, chess, word games, math games – anything, everything. He was better. And worse, he was kind and gracious, always offering to help me improve, always making excuses, using my age or size as excuses for my failures. I hated him.

Everything about that day is as clear and present in my mind as on the day itself. The warmth; the entwined fragrances of the seemingly hundreds of species of non-native flowers my father's haughty, talented gardener coaxed to life in an unsuitable environment; the shouts and camaraderie of the group of guys, some rich (but none nearly as rich as my family), some not. Some were on the team with my brother, but others were just ordinary boys, though, like my brother, with a tendency toward a disgusting goodness.

Someone picked up a football, of course, and during a play that I didn't even fully understand, something amazing happened: It was a moment, just a moment of magic for me. One perfect moment. Somehow, I caught a pass. It wasn't a real team, just a few guys playing on the mansion grounds, but it didn't matter. I actually had the football in my hand. I was running, I was flying, levitating practically, toward my first touchdown ever.

They were cheering for me calling my name, telling me to go! Go! And there was my brother: the only thing between me and the goal, effortlessly closing the gap between us. I couldn't let it happen. Not this time, not this one and only possible time. I really didn't intend to hit him quite so hard. Truly. And I wasn't really aiming for his throat. I just wanted to push him hard enough to slow him down. So I stuck my fist out.

I heard him gagging and gasping for breath, but I couldn't stop. It would have been the first time I'd ever beaten him at anything. I wanted to keep flying, to keep racing to victory even if the cheers were now angry hoots and curses. But I glanced back. I looked behind me to make sure he wasn't there, or to see if I had really hurt him. I don't know which.

And I tripped. I'll never know what bit of nature decided to place itself in that spot at that precise moment. A root? A rock? Or perhaps a gleeful imp sent to punish the transgressions of a jealous brother. That same imp who doused Cain's fire and tattled to God. But I tripped. I went down just like the old me, the usual me, always went down. And two, then three, then all of my brother's friends (they were, of course, all his friends, even the ones on my team) piled on. And something in my leg... snapped.

My father, without bothering to check on my welfare for himself, had one of his doctors take care of me. Over my brother's objections, his loyal sycophants made sure my father knew every detail of my evil-doing. Like all my father's employees, this doctor, Harriss was his name, was a possession. Though

highly intelligent and now quite wealthy thanks to working for Ndoley, he was peculiarly suited to slavery. It would never have occurred to him to leave my father's employ. So it was easy to make him do what I wanted.

I had heard they were doing some experiments with Realteeth that weren't publicized. They were originally looking for new applications that would extend the scope of the product's market. Nails were an obvious way to go, and after Realnails™ was launched, most of the other nail hardening products disappeared from the shelves in a scant nine months. That next year, my father became, without question, the richest man on the planet.

But there were still other possibilities. What would happen if someone with no injuries had bones reinforced with Realteeth? Was there a way to exponentially increase the hardness of Realteeth? And, of course, the inevitable question: Were there possible military applications?

It was during the very early stages of this quest that my injuries, my goals, and Dr. Harriss' six children's university tuition payments came together to map out my future.

"When you fix my leg, make me taller."

He froze in place for so long, I thought he had had a heart attack on the spot and died standing up. Finally, he took a breath and carefully, oh so carefully, began to try to talk me out of it. Dangerous. Experimental. Unproven. Potentially lethal.

I waited as I imagined my father might do at a negotiation. I allowed him to talk as long as he needed to, nodding occasionally, appearing to be sympathetic, weighing his words thoughtfully. Then I did what I'm sure my father had done many times: I gave him the final word. Very quietly, very simply, very powerfully.

"My father would like it, Dr. Harriss."

I almost felt sorry for him as I watched the conflicting emotions race across his face. Surprise/confusion/suspicion/fear. He hadn't heard this from my father, but then my father never spoke to him directly. Suppose what I said were the truth? But what if I were lying? What if... The poor man had no choice. Either way, he knew that if I didn't get what I wanted, I could make his life very unfulfilling.

I can't describe the pain of that first procedure. For days, my legs burned like someone had spilled acid inside my skin. I didn't sleep through the night for weeks. And when I did, my brother was there laughing at me, running like the wind through my dreams as I chased him on legs that had been chopped off just below the knee.

But the day came when the pain stopped, and I stood up and walked. And I was taller. Taller. More than two inches taller. And after I walked, I began to run. I knew in a very short time that I had never run so fast, and I was getting faster. Dr. Harriss and I discovered that the improved polymer didn't just repair damaged

bone, it made the bone far stronger than before. My legs could do things I hadn't dared dream of.

The following years raced by in a blur, or rather, I raced through them. Once I easily beat my brother at a foot race, I lost interest in competing at sports with him. The stunned look on his face provided only a moment's satisfaction. Harriss had wisely let my father know that the operation was successful, and when there was no negative reaction (no reaction at all actually), we had *carte blanche*. He knew and I knew that we were partners now. Both of us wanted to see how far we could go.

My arms and hands were next, then three more inches of height. My bones were almost indestructible, and I was as tall as my brother, but I discovered that stronger bones did not make stronger skin. I could easily punch through a wall or leave an indentation in a floor if I stamped hard enough, but my skin was still just skin. Every blow I struck left massive bruising.

So I sent Harriss on a quest: He became my medical discoveries detective. He studied and learned about any and every procedure or drug that might potentially give the human body more longevity and strength. Better, stronger, faster. Me, I became the living incarnation of the superior human only imagined in science fiction stories. I was very careful to keep my new strength a secret. Even Dr. Harriss wasn't sure of the extent of my abilities (my "powers", I liked saying to myself).

Yes, I admit it. At first, the goal was to be more like my brother, except better. I admit it freely. I wanted to be not just taller and stronger, but also handsomer. Then one day, a girl my brother was dating said a few words to me shortly before she disappeared.

"You almost look as good as your brother now, but it's different when you're a born beauty not a manufactured one, don't you think? I mean, man-made things are just... inferior." Since I never saw her again, I never got the opportunity to answer her. These days, she might be able to see how wrong she was.

The first time I went to a Jacksonian meeting (and this wasn't yet the official name of the group), there were only about 40 people present – and this was their "national convention." They had me listed as their "celebrity guest speaker." No topic was listed, of course, since they weren't sure I'd show up. I wasn't either, but I thought it might be fun. Their publicity described them as people who were "spearheading (their) destiny through Self-Design." They no longer felt bound to follow the rules of "normal" human ideas and ideals of physical beauty. They were changing their interactions with the world by taking control of the image they presented to the world thereby changing the world's perception of them. I thought it all sounded wacky but intriguing.

I was introduced by a man who was born a woman. He'd decided, for reasons of his own, to retain his breasts. His rambling, if mercifully short, speech referred to "The Jackson"¹ who "led the way" and to the cosmic right to be ourselves. Then, calling me the "highest profile and best known Jacksonian on earth," he called me to the podium.

They were silent at first. At that time I was just over 2 meters (about 6'8") tall, and I didn't have wings, but I like to think that even then, I was rather striking. My first inclination was to correct his clever bit of misinformation, but as I walked across the stage and a picture of the old me was flashed on several screens throughout the room, they rose with a roar that sounded like 400 instead of 40. It was the first time in my life that a group of people had received me in this way. I think they loved me even then.

I really didn't have anything prepared. I had planned to say a token hello/thank you/nice being here, but after their heartfelt welcome, I knew I couldn't. I looked at them closely. They were... different. Not one vaguely resembled another (except for the "quadruplets" who were not related by blood but had had themselves surgically altered to look alike). There were tattoos of every size and hue, multicolored eyes and hair, no hair, 10-inch fingernails, permanently green lips, eyes tattooed on eyelids. One woman looked the same back and front, because the image of her face was etched on the back of her hairless head. There were people with extra protuberances implanted under the skin of their arms or scalp. These were individuals. They were like me.

Somehow, I found my voice and began to speak words that seemed to come from a me that hadn't existed a few moments before. The love that I felt flowing from them to me freed me to say things I didn't know I felt.

"Welcome to the Age of Self-Design. No matter what they may say about us, we are going to be who and what we decide to be." More applause. "I confess to you that when I started changing my appearance, it wasn't for me, it was to please others. I wanted so much to be accepted!" They groaned and nodded in sympathy. "But then, I discovered something: By controlling my own appearance, I was able to take control of my life. I am literally a self-made man. And what's wrong with that? I control my own destiny, and so do you. No, we don't look normal. Normal is banal and boring. There are those who would say that some of us don't look human. Well, who says we have to look human? What's so great about humanity? Maybe we're better than mere humans. Maybe their time has passed." There was a moment of silence, then they were on their feet howling their approval.

¹ "The Jackson" refers to popular singer Michael Jackson (late 20th to early 21st century) who drastically changed his appearance with drugs and surgery. He started as an African American (in the parlance of the times), but became what Jacksonians would now call Afrowhite (HUM). That is to say, African antecedents, becoming white, appearance mostly or all human.

I don't know what I said after that, though, of course, it was recorded, reported, and repeated everywhere. I only know that those words echoed over and over in my head. I heard my own voice saying, "What's so great about humanity?" But I had no answer for that question.

They surrounded me afterward, some to thank me or to talk, but many only wishing to be near me, to touch me as if they could heal whatever was wrong in their lives by merely touching my garments. One woman fainted. She lay there smiling as if caught in the throes of a beautiful dream or a great ecstasy.

In truth, the group was nothing special, nothing so unusual. Who has not seen tattoos, varicolored hair, pierced and sliced tongues? People even now remember The Enigma² and his tattoos and horns. Surgically altered humans have been around since the first caveman picked up jagged rock and used it as a knife. But it was the reason we came together, the acknowledgement that we were not like the others, that our birth as humans was a mistake.

I'm told the membership reached one thousand in a matter of days. It was another new, heady, and yes, welcomed experience. I was a media darling, and it had nothing to do with my brother's or father's accomplishments. People who stopped to talk to me asked about me, not them. This new "family" that I had found gave me a new outlook, a new confidence.

I can now share the sad fact that I foolishly expected to hear from my father. At last, I, too, was controversial. I was interesting and, most important, good for business. So I waited. And I waited. I suppose that in a way, I did hear from him. Only a few weeks after the convention, he held an international press conference. It seems he was thinking of scaling back his daily, hands-on involvement with the company, so looking ahead to retirement, he decided to name his successor.

And there they were in glorious color on all media everywhere – my father and my brother. My beloved, naturally beautiful, kind-hearted, generous, vegetarian, older brother. I wasn't invited to the coronation.

They were everywhere together after that: trendy restaurant openings, chat shows, even modeling in a celebrity fashion show (proceeds to my brother's favorite animal rights charity, of course).

He tried to make it up to me. I remember my brother looking up at me with understanding, guilt-ridden eyes. He had new ideas for the company, he said, and maybe I could help him out. We could work together.

I still can't remember if I was able to say anything, but I don't think so. The idea was forming in my head. I knew what I had to do.

²The Enigma was a circus performer and occasional specialty performer in the early 1990s. He was tattooed over much of his body and had artificial horns implanted. Many thought his appearance was demonic or satanic. Considered by many to be one of the earliest identified Jacksonians.

There was only one choice. He kept talking, but all I could hear was the fire burning in my head, screaming at me, saying over and over again, "Kill him, kill him, kill him!"

Two months, ten days, and three hours after that moment, my brother went hiking. He should have been back two days later, I'm told, but he went missing. They found him five agonizing days later (agonizing for my father and myself, I read somewhere), his beautiful young body clawed and mangled almost beyond recognition. A bear, they thought. Probably a sick or extremely hungry one that wasn't normally in the area.

How ironic, the press opined, that such a kind-hearted animal lover was killed by one of his beloved furry friends. Only Harriss and I knew that I had already had talons implanted in my left hand.

Regrets? Sometimes I see his unbelieving eyes as he backs away from me in terror, sometimes I hear his screams, but no, no regrets. I did what I had to do.

I think the police and rangers wanted to do more investigating, but my grief-stricken father didn't want his boy's body mutilated any further. He ended the inquiry and buried my brother. Did my father know? Who can say? I do know that it was more important to him to have an heir than to avenge the loss of a son.

After I killed my brother, my father killed me – or rather the idea of me, the reality of me. I never saw him close up again. He had his newspaper, magazines and online news edited so my name and picture never showed up. And since, when we accidentally ended up in the same general area, he wouldn't look at me, I don't suppose he ever really saw me again at all. I didn't care. He never wanted to look at me anyhow.

I decided on wings next. Most people don't know that a doctor named Rosen knew that wings were possible as far back as the late 1990s. It was just a matter of moving a few muscles and bones. They were only decorative at first. Flying hundreds of miles wasn't yet possible, but we gradually improved them.

The tail wasn't necessary, but it became the aspect of my persona that human women were most curious about, most enamored of. I did not disappoint. Oddly, they never thought of its similarity to a boa constrictor. They were too busy noticing its improvement over another kind of snake. It never occurred to them that, unlike the snake that gave life, it could crush the life out of a body slowly, pleasurably. Any references to Satan, the snake in the Garden of Eden, and such, are just silly.

A tabloid writer once did an "exposé" on me telling the "real story behind the story." It flashed across the internet in mere hours. It seems all that I am is a jumbled mess of childish anger against my father mashed up with a hatred of authority. I lashed out at her verbally, but it was only an idle threat, a righteously angry reaction to having my life's purpose trivialized in that way: I wasn't really

going to eat her children. I think people believed I was serious because of the rumors about us. She disappeared before I could ask her about it in person.

Some of my followers have devised a ritual of "Rebirth and Reunion" with their discarded limbs. It is for them the ultimate proof that they are no longer what they were. It's quite the amusing ceremony. They chant something like, "I rend and tear the tissue of my past life. I devour the self that once was. My past feeds my future with the promise of forever." I'm not sure of the exact words, but it's very serious and stately.

Human newspapers say some of us now exist solely on human flesh, but that is only a rumor. On the other hand, I've heard some say that fresh human flesh gives more energy than any other food or combination of foods. Of course, I can't vouch for this position myself.

These days, to my followers at least, I am something of a high priest, but it's more like the Promised One. People need to worship. They need gods and saints and angels. It was after I had Harriss add the second row of teeth and what might be called a beak that he stopped looking at me and started bowing when I entered the room. He has explained, you see, that all the genetic tinkering, all the improvements, all the strange, new chemicals have finally wrought the great change: Unless I choose to, I will not die. That is a choice I will never make.

Some time ago, the Jacksonians created a separate designation just for me: Afromulti (GAR): African antecedents, becoming indeterminate race, appearance, gargoyle. That was after a reporter described me as a "gargoyle incarnate, the living breathing embodiment of an ancient horror." (Now his children, I'd eat!) But that was many years and procedures ago. What I am now cannot be described by any words in the current human lexicon.

Our recruiting campaign has begun in earnest — my followers' idea of course. They've created some rather catchy slogans that will surely appeal to a broad spectrum of humans in different ways. One (my favorite I'll confess) is, "We're looking for a few good monsters." Then there's "Eater or Eatee — You Decide." The most direct, but perhaps the most intimidating and least friendly is, "Join Us or Die." I prefer the soft sell.

They're calling me a demon, the Antichrist, a monster that should be exterminated. They're right, but they came to that conclusion much too late. I am the Promised One, the end, the Omega who finishes the work of the Alpha, Shiva the Destroyer, Kali. I am what I am.

My father is only a few rattling breaths from death. He aged rapidly after my brother's unexpected, but timely, demise. He exists in a murky land of merciful forgetfulness. He refused any of the treatments and surgeries that could have prolonged his life. Well and good. I have plans for the future of Ndoley and the Jacksonians have plans for the future of the world. We may not keep that name. After all, the Jackson, enhanced though he was, remained essentially human. We have become more.

What's so great about humanity? If left unchanged and unperfected, nothing. Some of them will be wise enough to join us in this realization. The rest are not our concern.



In the name of the Jackson, the father of us all,

In the name of the Enigma, who pointed the way,

In the name of the Gargoyle, who takes us on the path,

We commit our bodies and souls

To the better world,

To the world of Change

Designed by We Ourselves

A Loyal Friendship: Roderick Usher & the Narrator

By Nyisha Johnson

In Edgar Allen Poe's short story, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the protagonist, Roderick Usher, exploits the unnamed narrator, a loyal but long lost childhood friend, because the narrator refuses to be influenced by the disorders and incest that afflict the Usher family. In the end, however, the narrator reaches an epiphany.

The narrator is summoned to aid his boyhood friend because of Usher's unknown illness. The narrator's visit will unleash a horrific scene of death, decay, and incest as the inevitable fall of the House of Usher occurs before his eyes. At first, the narrator refuses to see Roderick Usher's family disorders. He denies that Roderick Usher's family has a history of incest that has contributed to the disorders. The narrator's loyal friendship and childhood expectations of Roderick Usher contributes to his denial, despite that Roderick Usher reveals the symptoms of his hypochondria and his companion Madeline's disease.

Denial about Usher Family Disorders

Roderick Usher's letter to his boyhood friend "gave evidence of nervous agitation... spoke of acute bodily illness – of a mental disorder which oppressed him – and of an earnest desire to see" [the narrator] (150) who had been made aware of Usher's illness in a letter but ignores it because, after all, they were childhood friends. The narrator ignoring this serious news is very peculiar because he has not seen nor heard from Usher since they were children. Why should the narrator come to Usher's aid – perhaps because Roderick was his childhood friend. After all a friend is not someone who you have a mere affection towards; a friend is intimate. Obviously Roderick knows this and plays to the narrator's weakness. After all, why shouldn't his old friend help out an old buddy? The narrator is weak to flattery and the concept of loyalty; he admits, "It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said – it was the apparent heart that went with his request – which allowed me no room for hesitation..." (150). The narrator is flattered that his childhood friend decided to track him down out in the middle of "a distant part of the country..." (150) for his personal aid and comfort during his last moments.

Usher requests that his friend's reply not be a written one but a visit in response to Usher's urgency of course. Usher knows that the narrator is loyal and seems to know that flattery and loyalty are his weaknesses. It certainly appears that flattery and loyalty lead the narrator to make the personal visit and to ig-

nore the important implications of the letter and, later, to ignore Usher's illness and disorder. He makes the visit to the Usher House and is "unnerved" by its melancholy appearance and observes, "Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks" (150), a friend of loyalty and prone to flattery despite ill-fated souls that live in that house. He totally disregards every sign that tells him to run from the urge to save his friend from an inevitable end.

The narrator discovers that he knows very little about his friend except for the rumors that the Usher family chooses sexual companions from the direct family line. The narrator has the information he needs to assume that Usher's motive for summoning him is to reveal these family secrets that everyone else has been gossiping about for years but that few people believed. Usher wastes no time hiding these secrets from his friend, starting with the nature of his illness and its symptoms:

"He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments" (152).

The narrator ignores the warning signs of the symptoms because he has made a commitment; his loyalty remains strong, which helps Roderick unveil the shameful tainted history of the Ushers. Usher so desperately wanted people to know. The narrator is the "chosen one," the one who will endure this horrific sight and hear the tainted family history as a lesson to the families who dishonor these rules. His presence does not comfort Usher who says, "I shall perish; I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results" (153). Despite Usher confiding his family's terrible secrets, the narrator makes excuses, blaming the symptoms of the disease for Usher's erratic outburst, but the outburst is not erratic; Usher knows his doom, and he knows more about the narrator than the narrator thinks. As the narrator stays in the house, Usher unveils yet another secret that confirms the gossip. The Usher family line is tainted.

The Narrator's Denial of Incest

"He admitted with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin – to the severe and long continued illness of a tenderly beloved sister – his sole companion for long years – his last and only relative on earth and the last of the ancient race of the Ushers" (153).

Madeline, Usher's sister, is not dying from cataleptic disease but from the incestuous history that has caused it. The Usher family has kept their family line so close that their hereditary disease has overlapped many times over, and now has come to end their race. Usher and Madeline are the only living relatives, and for the first time, after much speculation, Usher confirms to the narrator. Even though, Usher confesses the source of his and Lady Madeline's diseases, the narrator still refuses to accept the nature of the problem when he says, "She [Madeline] had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady" (153). He refers only to her disease and not to the incest because he assumes that Usher literally refers only to her cataleptic disease. He does not think that the seriousness and the pestilence he witnesses are caused by incest. The narrator is also confused about trusting Usher's state of mind because, after all, he is a hypochondriac. The narrator is not in a hurry to make assumptions about his friend before he understands the facts in their entirety. In the meantime Usher and the narrator spend their time engaging in music, painting, and reading literary works.

The Narrator's Loyal Friendship to Roderick Usher

The narrator continues his loyalty and commitment to Usher in order to comfort him. They involve themselves in painting, reading, and listening to Usher's speaking guitar (153), which enhanced their close friendship on a spiritual level, trying to cheer a dark mind in a gloomy atmosphere (154). The narrator seems desperate to ease Usher because he fears the worse will come. In the end, he has to accept the inevitable. In the middle of their entertainment, Usher's hypochondria is reflected on the canvas when he paints "an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device." The painting reflects Usher's contemplation of a severe grim future for Madeline. The narrator "perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher" (154). The epiphany has at last come to him that Usher will surely die and the end will be horrific. Nevertheless, the narrator still cares for Usher and is determined to make his last moments pleasant by reading him the poem, "The Haunted Palace."

The poem maps out the narrator's fear of what will happen to Usher as the revelation of the epiphany takes place. The poem questions the narrator's perception of the hints Usher has given him throughout the story.

In stanza I (line 8):

Over fabric half so fair.

The fabric is an embodiment of the unveiling of the Usher family secrets; it symbolizes the narrator's unveiling of the truth told to him because of his intimate relationship with Usher as they engage again in similar interests.

In stanza III lines (18-22):

Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law,
Round about a throne, where sitting
(Porphyrogene!)

The spirits moving musically are Usher and the narrator because they are listening to Master Roderick Usher play his guitar to comfort himself. Porphyrogene, i.e., of royal birth, is Master Roderick Usher himself because his family was prestigious. In stanza V lines (35-36, 39-40):

(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

The phrase "old time entombed" foreshadows the entombment of Madeline alive. Afterwards, the narrator realizes that Usher must accept "the destinies of his family, and which made him what I now saw him – what he was. Such opinions need no comment and I will make none" (156). Then he begins to believe that Usher is not totally crazy but desperate for a conclusion. Out of loyalty he helps Usher to entomb Madeline and doesn't oppose it because he wants to help Usher reach his end. He also knows that Usher planned this ordeal because he could not let go of his denial. Therefore, the narrator becomes Usher's "accomplice" in every aspect, from the entombment to the demanding of Usher's conscious attention when he picks up another story. He says, "Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen; and so we will pass away this terrible night together." Roderick Usher entombed his twin sister alive and watches her bleeding as their house collapses and the deadly fragments fall on Roderick, while the narrator, his loyal companion, escapes the destruction.

The narrator's loyalty to Usher, and the confidence with which he keeps the family's secrets, stand the test of friendship, despite disease, incest, and death. The narrator realizes that Usher had been in as much denial as he himself had been until he realized that his family line was at an end. The narrator knows that he was not summoned to aid him, nor to comfort him, but to learn about the speculation behind the Ushers and release the family from its bondage – to help plot the inevitable fall of the House of Usher. Because his weakness for flattery, his strong sense of loyalty to an old friend that would not allow him to accept negative speculations, the narrator is indeed exploited by his own denial of Usher house disorders and incest.

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Matter of Proof

By Michael Gammon

Pete's yellow notepad was mostly filled. He used up most of his envelopes already too. *Four more dollars to the commissary for supplies; got to fill out the order form tonight.* Pete's cellmate bought candy bars and watched TV all day. *Sam's such a waste. He's given up; jail is his home.* Pete did push-ups first thing every morning and traded his dessert for vegetables at every meal. Mid-afternoon he threw his mat on the floor and did sit-ups, at night – squats. The rest of the time he read and wrote. The trustee went to the jail's pathetic law library for him. Every once in a while he found the right book. *I'm going to write my way out of this.* Mostly Pete wrote strategy notes. Told his story over and over, trying to get it out in the most convincing way. Sometimes he wrote letters too. For every ten letters he wrote to his public defender he got one in return. He wrote to people who he thought would make good witnesses, who'd attest to his character. But really, there was no one who knew anything truly relevant to his case. *I've been framed. I know everyone says it but in my case it's true.*

Officer Martin was bored by the hooker he had pinned down in the back of his squad car. "Get the fuck out, skank." He growled as he shoved her into the alley. She stumbled and spilled the contents of her purse onto pavement wet from the night's polluted drizzle and worse. Martin got out the other side, zipped up, and tucked his shirt in. On her knees, the prostitute reached back into the car for her stiletto heels. Martin spat back into the car. "Leave!" Holding the shoes by their straps she ran out of the alley. The sweaty, stinking, filthy cop opened the driver's side, flopped down and grabbed his pack of cigarettes from the dash. *I'm not satisfied at all.* He clicked a spark from the small torch and butane ignited into a blue pyramid. Nicotine and about ninety other poisons shot into his lungs. He leaned his head back. For a few seconds he felt alright. Then he saw another guy zipping up behind a dumpster. Martin got out and threw his cigarette down. He took out his flashlight and shined it in the guy's eyes. *Just an average schmo.* "Step over to the wall and get on your knees... Face the wall; put your hands behind your head."

Pete held it as long as he could; he didn't want to go to jail for public indecency and get labeled a sex offender, but he didn't want to soak his pants either. Rotten luck the cop car pulled into the alley just after he stepped in to drain. First he thought he'd wait it out behind the dumpster, but the cop was doing something in the back seat. Just about the time he thought he'd try to slip by, he

saw the back door open; a moment later a girl fell out. Pete stepped back into the shadow. The cop got back in the front seat and lit a cigarette. There was no holding it anymore. *Either I walk past this crooked cop caught in the act, or I piss right here.* He hoped the cop would just leave but he sat there to smoke. As Pete let go he had to suppress a groan of pleasure. The self-consciousness made him worry. *That cop is probably looking right at me.* He zipped and turned to see. Their eyes locked. *I'm just going to walk away.* Pete looked down as he strode, but only got about five steps into his exit attempt when the cop got out of the car.

"Step over to the wall and get on your knees... Face the wall; put your hands behind your head." His hand was on his gun but it wasn't drawn. He wasn't shouting but his voice was aggressive. Pete obeyed. The cop pulled the kneeling man's wallet from his pocket. *Twenty-eight years old, Chicago resident, licensed for motorcycle, no eye restrictions.* "Do you think this is a public restroom back here?"

If Pete had drunk two less beers every answer would have been "yes sir" or "no sir." But tonight he said, "I don't know. Do you think it's a whore house?" Martin ground his heel into Pete's ankle. "Arghhh."

"You don't know what you saw, punk."

"You don't either; how do you know that piss wasn't already there?"

"Okay, we'll play it like that." He pressed Pete's head into the wall to control him while he reached down to pull something from his sock, something kept under his ankle holster. Then he stood off the kneeling man. "Stand up and turn around." Pete stood, but his ankle hurt. He couldn't put all his weight on it; something was damaged in the joint. He turned to see the cop holding a cellophane cigarette wrapper. "A first offense yields up to 5 years in the state pen. It's a mandatory felony just because of the way you've got these packaged to sell."

Wookie slung rocks for about six months before he met the dirty cop. Somehow Officer Martin knew what he had, probably pinched another kid who pointed to him to get out of it. *Fuckin' rich kids from school who make dealing dangerous.* About halfway between school and home Martin used his car to cut Wookie off at an intersection. The wiry teenager flung his backpack down and started to run, but a nightstick flew into his legs and tripped him. Before he had a chance to get upright, the cop landed on him with a knee and pressed his thumb into a spot under his jaw that sent a jolt like electricity through his neck. When he was handcuffed in the back of the squad car all Wookie could think about were the twenty individually packaged rocks in his pocket. Officer Martin moved the car to a nearby park, got Wookie out, and bent him over the hood. He held the kid down and went through his pockets. When the cellophane was between his fingers, Officer Martin slid his hand out of Wookie's pocket and into his own. While he uncuffed the kid he said, "I guess our informant was a liar. Get the fuck

out of here." Wookie ran to the projects. *Damn, now I'm \$400 in debt.*

The dean of the school searched Wookie's locker after two kids were caught getting high in the bathroom. They found money but no drugs until they checked his pants pockets while he was dressed for gym class. The police were called in and Wookie didn't say anything except, "I want a lawyer." Two officers pressed him to give up his source so he could avoid more severe charges. He stayed silent thinking, *I could get killed for that, or a pumpkin head that would turn me into a gimp.* He waited for the lawyer. She told him that at age seventeen he could be kept in jail with all the other inmates, or he could go home and face misdemeanor charges if he cooperated.

"Okay, I'll tell you about this cop – Officer Martin. He steals drugs from pushers, ya know what I'm sayin'? He just lets us go after he's found all our shit. He's probably sellin' the stuff."

The public defender looked at him for a few moments then said quietly, "You don't want to go that route with me."

The warning didn't register with Wookie. "Look, I know this cop's name. I know where he patrols, what shift, everything. I told you and it's your job to help me."

"You don't get it. In my profession, what you can prove is all that counts."

Martin sat in the patrol car sipping coffee. He was always bored these days; vice was what he lived for. *One fuck-up and my career hits a wall.* The stings were a rush. Tape rolling from the camera in the van, he'd play the John – that was his favorite part. Barging into the hotel room with guns drawn was great too. His last sting everything was going down according to plan: after they recorded the right exchange of words they knocked and the officer playing the John opened the door and stood aside. The whore was hyped-up though. She screamed back at Martin when he told her to get on the floor. He moved in closer and she threw her glass pipe at him. Martin blasted her. The first thing they did was check her purse for a weapon. Scissors were all they found. They placed it by her hand and then checked her vitals. She was dead. The investigation determined that Martin acted with borderline excessive force. He was suspended for a month. *Ever since it's been patrol. At least I get third shift.*

Sam and Wookie played cards for a few hours each day. Other than that there wasn't much to do but watch TV. Wookie was a loud little punk but Sam liked him better than his cellie. *Pete thinks he's better than everyone else here. He'll get his eventually.* Wookie came to their room and taunted Pete: "Yo cuz,

write my motions and I'll give you my vegetables." Pete ignored him. "You hear me? I want you for my jailhouse lawyer."

Pete looked up. "Go play your cards. I got nothing for you."

"Whatever man. You're as fucked as the rest of us. You think you really know somethin', but what can you prove?" Pete's pencil stopped; he stared at the page. Wookie noticed his pause. "Yeah, you dunno shit that'll help you."

Sam rolled off his bunk and walked up to Wookie, "Got any squares? Or are we playing for sweet picks today?"

Wookie got Pete thinking in another direction. He decided that he should concentrate on attacking the arresting officer's character. He wrote a letter to his public defender. It said in part, "I am going to need work records on the arresting officer, Martin, as his credibility is an issue in the particular defense I wish to make." She ignored three letters to this effect so Pete filed a motion requesting the records. *I'll bet I'm not the first person he's set up. There's a chance that I'll find something that can be used as evidence. It's worth a try.*

When the records arrived at the public defender's office she gave them a cursory read. It was just enough to invoke a sense of obligation. She called Martin's former supervisor in vice. "I'd like to have a conversation with you completely off-record."

"Okay. What've you got?"

"A client determined to beat a 'possession/intent' felony. He is pressing a defense based on the credibility of a vice officer demoted to patrol. I have other information indicating this officer is involved in illegal acts, but my source is not credible." She paused.

"OK. What are you saying?"

"Well, I want to make it clear that it was my client who petitioned for access to police records. After looking it over I believe this officer's behavior could, if brought to the surface, compromise this case, future cases, and possibly even former convictions."

"Officer's name?"

"Martin."

"Thanks for your help. If there is anything else, give me a call."

Wookie and Sam were playing cards on a table made of concrete. The kid looked around and spoke quietly to his senior, "I got a whole pack of Newports."

"How'd you get that?"

"I'm playing these cops against each other. One of 'em is dirty so the others are askin' me about him. When I tell them stuff they hook me up."

"No shit? Lemme get a Newport."

Wookie reached into his orange jumpsuit, pulled the pack from his shirt-sleeve, and slid out two cigarettes. Sam shuffled cards. After he dealt a hand he lit his cigarette. As they played it, Wookie would say, "Yeah! Now, what about that?" every time he made some points. Sam just grunted in response. When he scored he took a drag from the cigarette.

Sam asked, "So who's the dirty cop?"

"I can't talk about it."

"You started it. And besides, who you with anyway?"

"Come on, it ain't like that. They give me squares and shit; I don't wanna lose my hook-up."

Sam took a thoughtful drag. The cigarette burned almost to the filter. He put it out, glanced around the jail's day area and then to Wookie. "I'll bet I can guess his name."

Wookie looked up from dealing the cards. "Who do you think it is?"

"Martin."

"How'd you know? Has he been jackin' you too?"

"You're probably right. We shouldn't talk about it. Let's just play cards."

Martin was sick of streetwalkers. The last dirty hooker stunk up his police car. Febreeze wouldn't fix it so he had to scrub the seat. As he did he formulated a plan to up his habit a notch. His vice years taught him that the highest quality girls were mob owned. Those girls didn't walk the streets; they were shown off at clubs or kept on call. They usually had security with them – another reason they were so expensive. But Martin knew the bigger risk. *The mob pays their taxes and some; they won't like giving up even a little extra.* Still, he had himself built up in his own head as The Man. *I'll tax their asses if I want.*

He pulled it off a couple times a week for a month. When they'd show up at the hotel he'd show them the coke and explain their choices. Every time they agreed to go. The girl's security would see her cuffed and put into the squad car so they'd take off. Martin would go wherever was convenient and indulge himself. *I could probably sell the coke I steal and afford these hookers straight up.* But that wasn't enough of a thrill for him. *I'm taxing the niggers and the wops.* His second month in, Martin started to think the girls' security might be following them. *Let 'em come.*

Sam pled guilty and took a ten year sentence, expecting to be out in four. A few days before he was transferred to a state facility, he called his nephew Alonzo.

"Lonzo, they're giving me a personal contact visit – hug my wife an' shit before they send me down the river. You got to come with her for that visit, alright?"

"I dunno, Sam, I'm probably workin' or somethin'."

"No, I'm telling you – you got to come see me during the personal contact visit."

Alonzo was silent for a bit, then spoke slowly. "Okay, Sam. Yeah, alright, I'll be there."

The day of the visit Alonzo showed. The first thing Sam did was kiss his wife while he grabbed her chunky backside. "You better be around to fix my ribs in a few years. Alonzo is going to watch out for you, alright?"

He shook his nephew's hand, "You got that?" Then he leaned in close and said in a low voice, "Martin's own people are after him now."

Alonzo nodded. The men let go of each other and they spent the next hour making small talk and joking around. Alonzo was glad he came. His uncle knew he did security for the crack house on 15th St. and Officer Martin was annoying around there, but didn't tax too often. The people who were really sick of him had recently hired Alonzo to do prostitution security. *They'd pay a guy a lot to do a cop.*

He presented them with an offer, the most he felt he could reasonably ask.

"We already got the go-ahead. You can have the job if you want but it's virtually no risk – the investigation is already decided. It's worth about a third of what you're asking." Alonzo was angry but wouldn't let it show. "You could be the right guy for this because we want it done on your side of town, not ours. Everything goes right and we'll think of you in the future."

Somehow they always knew what was going on and already had the whole thing coldly assessed. Alonzo respected that. He took the job, knowing that it would pay more down the road. *I'll end up with a Chevy not a Cadillac.*

Alonzo stood in the park. It was chilly. He wore a ski mask and his hood was up. From a distance he watched Martin hassle some kid. *The fucking coward always goes after the young ones – a bottom feeder.* The cop released his prey and waited a minute, watching the kid all the way to the street. Then he shoved his meager spoils in his sock. While he was bent over Alonzo quietly approached him from behind. He put ten rounds in the dirty cop. Five probably sunk into Kevlar, but at least three went into the man's head. Alonzo ran until he was on a path shrouded by the shadows of trees. When he reemerged in moonlight, his mask was off and his hood was down. Within an hour the pistol was at the bottom of Lake Michigan. *Fixed investigation or not, I'm covering my ass.*

Pete finished his sit-ups and sat at the small metal table bolted to cinderblocks. A month passed since the court granted him the right to see files

from the arresting officer's record. His public defender wasn't returning his calls and his desire to sleep let him know that he was beginning to get depressed. *If I exercise more and write a few more letters to friends and family then I'll snap out of it.* He was staring at his notepad with nothing in mind to write when someone called his name. He looked up and the turnkey was standing there. "You have court in an hour."

"When was this scheduled?"

"I don't know but the superintendent says you can get a shower now if you want."

Pete showered, shaved, and brushed his teeth. The turnkey took him to a conference room where his public defender was sitting. "You're in luck. A documentation mistake made the physical evidence in your case invalid. The charges will be dropped at the hearing today."

Pete's life was in disarray and he was trying to rebuild everything from his mom's place in Cicero. While he ate breakfast, he stared at the pattern on her linoleum table and thought. He thought about his former employer – wondered if he'd give a good reference. He thought about his credit cards – they jumped to maximum interest because he missed payments. Pete's motorcycle was gone. From jail he told his brother to sacrifice it in order to save the work truck. It didn't yield even half enough to make bond, but it was enough to prevent a repo. Now Pete hoped to find work in time to make the next payment. Despite it all, he felt pretty good. *The Beast swallowed me, but it spat me out – and I survived.*

Pete left his mom's place for a day of job hunting. He got stuck in traffic on his way to meet a contractor. The first chance he took a side street. He sped down the road, didn't see the parked squad car, but a moment later he saw lights in his rear view mirror. *Goddamn it to hell! I'll never make it to this appointment and I sure can't afford a ticket.* He pulled over and the officer approached his truck. Pete hoped the guy would be reasonable – maybe listen to why he was speeding and give him a warning.

The cop asked for no explanation, said only, "License and proof of insurance."

Pete waited. He knew the officer would run his name for warrants. *Oh shit, my arrest record!* Pete felt painted black. He wondered what an arrest without a conviction looked like to a cop – wondered if the technicality that got the charges dropped would linger between the lines of his record.

The officer came back to the truck with his hand on his gun. He paused behind the driver's side door and peered into the hatch. Then he asked, "Do you have any drugs or weapons in the vehicle?"

"No sir, no weapons or drugs. I don't use drugs."

"Do you mind if I search the vehicle?"

Self-Made Man

By Caron Tate

You know this boy?
I know him

See he was never
good
enough
never
enough.

So okay okay
he made
good
made IT
good.

Found Bach and
learned to say
Bach not Bock
so if you knew
about such things
you'd hear his
German lessons
talking

(90 day free trial learn
to speak like a
native
full money back
gua ron tee).

Found white women
bespoke suits
800 thread count
(and that's a lot of threads)
jag-gyu-ars
cause if you say
jaguar like that

you are
somebody

Learned that greenbacks
earned a measure of
respect

never reserved for
black skin

Let the church
say A-man.

You know this boy?
I know him

Wouldn't have nothing
less than
a Blonde
on his arm.

Won't stay in a
Holiday Inn
or eat
that soul food.

Can't remember
when soul food was
a delicacy
when food was
a delicacy.
Won't remember.

He learned the ways of
etiquette
knew all the forks and
spoons and stuff and
where to escargot.

Could name the wines
and grapes
and smell a cork

turn up his
nose
and wave his hand
so hoity toity like who knows what
Back to the kitchen!
(off with his head?)

Yeah he could dance and get
buck wild
but having learned
the box step and the
fox trot
Nevermore will make a move that
makes one
sweat
Not one drop.

You know this boy?
I know him

Finally had a
daughter
Made a child as
perfect
as he never was.

Isn't she lovely?
Perfect creamy skin
She got

Good Hair
so looong, so pretty

Doesn't get to see her.
Mommy said
You fool you're with me cause
I'm White
Took his daughter
good hair perfect skin
Found herself a
Good Black Man
who

Loved her
for
Herself.

You know this boy?
I knew him.
Knew him when the
blonde girl number 3 or 5 or more
Crushed his heart
like dead and
dried leaves
Leaving him
heart-less

And he found
me
treated me as badly as
second best
should
be.

Sneered at my
nappy hair
and table set
with
only

two

forks...

You mean you don't speak
French?

You know this man?
I know him

Last seen
pouring out his
bitter middle years
into the everfull glass at
the clubs

where

everybody

knew his name

“That Old Guy

who will

always buy

a few rounds”

before trying to choose

from among the

less than perfect

more than adequate

who knew that they were

good enough.

who laughed and left

That Old Guy

to drink alone and

try again

next time.

You know this boy?

I know him

Still a little boy

never

good

enough

never

enough.

Did his best to

make it

Best to make

it

good.

But it was

at last

only good enough

for a

Self -Made

Man.

Tillie's Last Hammock

By Eric M. Christians

How is it that two oaks, the only pair of trees in Tillie's backyard, grew exactly ten feet apart? There's one maple, one walnut, one cottonwood, and one willow, not including the old elm stump. There's a grove of pines, all at staggered heights, and three fruit trees – an apple, a cherry, and a peach. But there were two oaks, as if God had denied the spot to the oaks but someone else said, "There have to be two there – there have to be two oaks." God didn't plant two oaks in Tillie's backyard. But there they stood.

Tillie's bony hand trembled as she wrapped the rope around the trunk of the oak and tied a perfect square knot. She groaned a little while she paced toward the other oak and bent down to pick up the rope. The canvas of the hammock flapped in the wind while she tied the loose end to the twin. The first knot had been easy. This one, however, needed to be tight. She wasn't securing a ship to a dock or wild stallion to a hitching post, but the knot had to hold the weight of a hundred and twenty pound woman – maybe a hundred and ten. As she gripped the rope and felt it burn in her hand, she looked down at them, amazed. Were these her hands? Hers had been pink and pudgy, her little fingers belonging to cookies and cakes, her tiny nails once adorned with mauve or shell. Now the skin on her hand clung to the bone, her nails chipped and dirty, and what used to be pink now looked more yellow, maybe even green. The rope may have burned, but it could do no more damage to these hands.

"It's too cold."

Tillie ignored the words. She laid the blanket across the hammock canvas and dropped a pillow at the east end. She looked at it for a couple seconds or moments, but not minutes. There wasn't time for minutes. Every minute had to count. Thinking about every step, every move, every twist, Tillie turned her body and eased it into the hammock. The rope slid maybe a half an inch down the east tree, but that was all. There wasn't enough weight to strain the ropes beyond that – maybe a hundred and ten pounds, maybe less. Once she laid her head on the pillow she pulled the blankets across from each side and tucked them under her chin. "Ahh," she exhaled, her little body still swinging a bit from the movement into the hammock.

"Where are all your friends?"

Tillie closed her eyes and squinted. Her lips moved ever so slightly but only the faint whisper of air could be heard in lieu of anything being said. Her sunken cheeks, once rose petal pink and smooth like a plastic doll's, looked brown, almost bruised, the lines under her eyes having turned into sinkholes, brown near the eye and yellow on the rim of the skull. For over fifty years her nose had been

almost nondescript, a tiny triangle dropped into the center of her face, the envy of her childhood peers. As she lay in the hammock her nose jutted above the rest of her face, blotches of red and scales of skin joined with the dampness of sickness and loneliness. Her lips kissed many a boy in her day – Michael, Rudy, Saul, and Joshua to name a few. Those soft, moist, sweet lips disappeared with the likes of those boys and turned to thin, cracked, scab-filled portals to her long forgotten mouth.

“You wanted this, Tillie? To die beneath these two oaks?”

She had never been for want as a girl. Her father treated her like a princess. Her mother told her she should enjoy life and not tie herself to one man. Her father gave her a car and a stereo. Her mother bought her books about self-awareness. Her father gave Michael a hundred dollars when he picked Tillie up for the prom. Her mother took her to the doctor a month before the prom. Her father said, “Marry a good Jew.” Her mother said maybe he should have taken his own advice. Her father left home a month after Tillie’s graduation. Her mother died in Tillie’s house ten years ago to the day.

Tillie opened her eyes and stared at the empty space in the yard. “Well?” she said. “Aren’t you going to say anything?”

The wind rushed across the yard and blew the leaves from the west to the east. But there never was a point where west was empty and east was full. They blew and they blew and they blew. There were always enough leaves in the west and never too many in the east. An iron chair, one of its legs buried in a couple inches of dirt, sat next to a defunct fountain. Tillie couldn’t imagine right away why it was there, but finally remembered that she used to watch the goldfish in the fountain pool. The last time must have been months ago – maybe years. She had to have been heavy enough to embed the leg into the ground, perhaps when she weighed a hundred and twenty or thirty. Now, her hundred pound frame would scarcely affect the chair – if she even weighed that.

“Nothing to say, now?” she said again.

The screen door on the back porch opened with the wind and slammed again, slapping the door frame twice before closing. A rake that rested against the steps slid forward and fell to the sidewalk. She started to weep for a moment when she thought how her mother would bring a couple glasses of lemonade through that very door and the two of them would watch the sunset, her mother sitting in the iron chair and Tillie lounging in the hammock. More than once her mother knocked over a rake or a hoe or a broom that sat beside the back steps. And the screen door always double-slammed shut.

“Why do you provoke yourself? Your memories bring nothing but pain.”

Tillie shut her eyes. “My memories are all I have.”

“You relish your past?”

“It’s all I have.”

"You find peace in your own singular life?"

"It's all I ever wanted."

"It's all you ever got. You wanted more."

Tillie pulled her head up and felt the breeze on her face. It was cool and she was glad to be covered, but the breeze felt nice. As nice as it felt, she felt a pain in her chest forcing her to breathe a bit heavier. A swirl of leaves surrounded her for a moment and passed, so close were they that she could smell the scent that's usually not sensed until they are burned. The leaves stopped swirling but the rustling never ended. "I wanted more."

"Of course, you wanted more. You wanted more than a kiss from Michael."

"I wanted a life."

"You wanted a life with him."

"But I got a kiss."

"And that's all you got."

"My mother got more than a kiss. And it was all taken away." Tillie rested her head on the pillow again. "I got a kiss."

"But that's all you got."

"And you can't take that away from me."

"You're pathetic - happy to lie in your hammock. You watched the world go by from that hammock. Now you're going to see your last from that hammock."

"Go away. You never did me any good before. It's too late now."

"I did my best. But you wouldn't listen."

Tillie's breathing grew more pronounced, as breathing through her nose could no longer provide enough air. She lay still, the only movement now being caused by her breathing - although her ninety-eight pound frame moved very little.

A mass of gray clouds parted in the west and let a few rays of light pop through as if painted by Michelangelo onto a canvas in the sky. The sun never did reveal itself, but more and more rays wandered into view, one time casting a light on the hill down the road. A silver star atop a monument from the cemetery reflected the light of the sun for an instant, but faded quickly.

"You wanted more."

Tillie could no longer speak easily, so she shook her head.

"You wanted more - and now it's over."

Tillie took a couple deep gulps of air and opened her eyes to stare at the underside of the oak trees between which she rested. They towered high above, swaying in the wind, still holding onto more green leaves than the other trees, save the pines. Their trunks may have stood fast, but the great branches born of those trunks rocked to the pace of the wind. Tillie thought she could hear the sound of wood creaking in those oak branches. "Who says it's over?"

When Tillie stopped breathing her eyes remained affixed to the tops of the oaks, her mouth agape from the last breath. An acorn dislodged from the top of the east oak and fell through the branches – knocking loose leaves, dead twigs and other acorns – and dropped directly into Tillie's mouth.





Alone in the Night - Jeremy Wilburn



The Trinity - Jeremy Wilburn

author/staff biographies

Lori Basiewicz needs to learn to say no. In addition to serving as editor for *The Alchemist Review*, she is the co-founder and former managing editor of *Coyote Wild*, a speculative fiction e-zine, and is in the process of marketing her first novel and finishing her second, which, at this writing, she hopes to use as her Master's thesis. She sporadically publishes magazine and newsletter articles, short stories, and satire. Lori seeks balance by practicing aikido.

Nathan Bennett is a senior working toward his Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts at the University of Illinois at Springfield. He has served as secretary of the Art Student League (ASL) and currently holds office as Senator At Large with the Student Government Association. After graduation he plans to work as a graphic designer and attend graduate school. His hobbies include art, outdoor activities, photography, writing short bios about himself, and movies.

Eric M. Christians recently reached the age of 50. He has lived in Illinois most of his life and has been writing since the age of eight. He has been published on a limited basis in Lincoln Land's *The Harvester* and *The Ruptured Seed*, and a local literary journal, *Prism Quarterly*. Eric will graduate, hopefully, from UIS this Spring with a BA. He majors in English and minors in Communication.

Mary Colligan is in her first year at UIS in the Online English Degree Program. Prior to transferring from Illinois Central College in East Peoria, Illinois, she served the college's literary arts journal, *The Summit*, as its chief editor. She loves the opportunity that working on an editorial staff gives to see the creativity, talent, and artistry of her fellow students.

Michael Gammon the writer is irredeemably compelled to spread the leakage from his mind. As an editor, he derives an odd pleasure from minutia, and a more understandable pleasure from watching a product become far more than the sum of its parts.

Gary Haddock is an old geezer who has survived several career reincarnations without noticeable elevation to a higher state or better pay. Casual observers have noted in their private journals that he displays a certain mental strangeness yet to be accurately defined in a reputable psychiatric journal. Lunacy is the closest anyone has come to describing it. Gary does not consider his condition an affliction but a goal.

Elizabeth Johnson lives at two computers, one at home for the UIS Online English Program and one at work at a high school for drug addicts in foster care! She plans to teach English to at risk youth after she graduates and gets outside more. She enjoys being involved in the creative processes of the students at both homes.

Nyisha Johnson is a sophomore in the English department and is currently in the process of transferring to Columbia College to pursue a career in writing fiction and screenplays. This is Nyisha's first-time being published. She likes to read Edgar Allen Poe, write, listen to music, and watch classic films from the 1930s-1980's when the movies were at their best. Occasionally, she also goes to the movies to see current films that pique her interest.

Lola L. Lucas is author of *At Home in the Park: Loving a Neighborhood Back to Life*, a collection of her columns about life, historic preservation and community building in Springfield. By day a mild-mannered state employee, Lola moonlights in the mornings as an adjunct faculty member at UIS. She's won awards for her poetry from The Wednesday Club in St. Louis and the National Career Development Association. Her ambition is to win a Rhysling Award for science fiction & fantasy poetry and her passions are kaleidoscopes, tarot, storybook architecture, her husband Kevin, and their three standard poodles. She has just held her 10th annual invitational cheesecake competition.

Amelia Maddox attends UIS online from the comfort of her home in Waco, Texas, where she lives with her husband of 9 years, their three children, two cats, and a dog. She has a constantly messy house, piles of projects to get to, and a perpetually long to-do list, but she wears the insanity well. Having finally decided that she wants to be a copyeditor when she grows up, she is thrilled to add "*The Alchemist Review* staff" to her resume.

Lucy Marrero is finally graduating from the Online English Program! Her son was happy to hear this until he found out that graduate school psychology means a whole lot more of, "Not now, I'm writing a paper!" At least she'll eventually have a few degrees to show for it, though. This is her second year published in *The Alchemist Review*. She's also been featured in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Hipmama Magazine*.

Emily Martin, a woman who defies Earth time, will always meet deadline in the middle. She spent several years editing and writing for the campus newspaper, all the while keeping a full head of hair. Although she studied the art of English rhetoric at UIS (under the austere title of "Communication"), Emily plans to take her writing, editing and design experience to the farm. Understanding green design and sustainable agriculture are among her next endeavors.

Curt Meyer holds an MA from the University of North Texas in English and is ABD towards a PhD in American Literature. He taught at his alma mater and at Clemson University before coming to UIS. He is the former editor of *The North Texas Review*. Curt enjoys cooking, sci-fi and fantasy, role-playing, and mixed martial arts. He is one of three Hare Krishnas residing in Springfield.

Petr Novak escaped his birth country of Czechoslovakia while still a child, spent six months in a refugee camp and an obscure pensione in Rome. Afterwards, he visited the Vatican where Pope John Paul II kissed his head. In the years since arriving in the United States, he has worked as a dishwasher, busboy, cook, been employed by

American Airlines, and served in the 82nd Airborne Division. He currently works for a Chicago advertising agency and lives in Illinois with his wife and 4-year old son.

Julie Perino spends her time pondering the meaning of life and the true purpose of the slinky. She is currently working on her Master's degree in English and hopes to pursue a career in publishing. She is positive that she'll finish her education and be ready to go out and get a real job any decade now.

Sarah Elizabeth Quigley is a sophomore Capital Scholar Honors English major at UIS. A native of New Athens, IL, Sarah plans to teach high school English in addition to writing about her exciting adventures growing up in the Midwest. She intends to write her senior thesis about the fact that America's favorite carbonated beverages are called 'soda,' not 'pop.'

Jim Stephens is a first year student in the UIS MIS MS program online. He lives with his wife, son, and dog near San Francisco.

Melissa Beran Taft is a student at UIS in the teacher education program. She has already recieved a BA and MA in English from UIS in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Her Masters' thesis was written about her favorite author, Sheri Reynolds. She reads, writes, teaches preschool, and occasionally has time to catch a movie. She would love to teach composition and literature one day... if she ever gets out of school.

Caron Tate is looking forward to her 60th birthday, which is very soon. It will be the date for the acquisition of her first tattoo. Meanwhile, she will continue writing, attending UIS as an undergrad, and deciding what she'll be when she grows up. There's plenty of time.

Lindsey "Rory, The Machine" Tomsu rattles off 100 juicy business descriptions in an 8-hour day as a business editor. The redheaded dynamo is equally adept with the editor's blue pencil as a UK copyeditor. She enjoys being a freelance editor and is obtaining her English degree to supplement her sociology and philosophy degrees. Her primary hobby is voraciously reading and collecting classic literature of all genres to the chagrin of her boyfriend who screams, "But we have no room for more strays!!"

Thomas E Webb is revising everything.

Jeremy Wilburn is the Marketing/Recruitment Specialist for the Office of Enrollment Management at the University of Illinois at Springfield. He graduated from UIS in May 2007 with a degree in Visual Arts and minors in both Communication and Computer Science. He is currently working on his Master's degree in Communication. Jeremy has been a photographer for around six years and has worked for UIS doing photography for two and a half years. He also does personal photos on the side. This is his second year contributing to *The Alchemist Review*.

