
IN MEDIAS RES



The Odyssey Project

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In Medias Res

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The Illinois Humanities Council

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Introduction

Homer's *Odyssey* starts *In Medias Res*—right in the middle of things—and that's the way all of us who have become part of the Odyssey Project came to it. We were already committed to ends we were not fully aware of having chosen. And the Project brought us into the middle of things as well—into a long tradition of reflection on those human ends that guide and impel us, whether or not we become conscious of them. Our common study of the humanities has become a collective focus of our individual purposes and passions, and it has carried all of us into new and uncharted waters.

Working in the Odyssey Project has thrown light on my own life, both backwards onto the problems and questions that brought me here to the middle of things, and forwards as I'm able to see from here, and my own greatest gratification working in the Project is seeing and hearing how it has done the same for others. I hope that your reading of *In Medias Res* will enable you to see and hear something of the wonder and the terror of this Odyssey, this voyage, as well.

The Illinois Humanities Council and the Clemente Course in the Humanities are deeply grateful to Anna Burch and Marybeth Southard for bringing this publication to its birth, and to Nia Gabrielle and Carolyn Roundtree for their judicious and compassionate work on the editorial board. To them and to all who have contributed here, I want to add my personal thanks for their courage, their commitment, and all their work in this Project, which continues to bear witness to the power of the humanities to transform human being, not least my own.



Amy Thomas Elder
Director of Odyssey Project Chicago



Editorial

I am honored to be able to provide an introduction for this important body of work. The short stories, essays, and poems included in this volume of "In Medias Res" are some of the best that I have read and were contributed by current students and graduates of the Odyssey Project.

These writers come from myriad backgrounds. They are old and young and in between, male and female. They are from Ethiopia as well as the West, North and Southside communities of Chicago. They are Spanish speaking. They are Black and White. What they have in common is their quest for truth, and meaning in life. They are also very brave.

I believe that writing - the simple act of committing your ideas to paper - remains one of the most powerful tools for personal, community, and worldwide change. As an Odyssey student, I was privileged to read and discuss the written works of our greatest thinkers from antiquity to contemporary times and reflect on how these writers changed the world (and continue to do so!).

In the works contained here, you will find, as I did, unvarnished truths about the writers personal experiences with death and love; with the metaphysics of survival; with the doubled-edged phenomena of rap music. These writers' voices are unique, strong, and clear. I sense the seeds of greatness in their words and pay homage to their journey.

I hope you will enjoy reading their works as much as I did.

Aluta Continua!

Carolyn Roundtree
August 13, 2012

ALUMNI EDITORIAL BOARD



Carolyn Roundtree

Carolyn is passionate about the humanities and the opportunity it affords for personal reflection and growth. She is a published writer of poetry and prose. Carolyn is a contributing author to the textbook "From Tragedy To Triumph" which emphasizes social responsibility for elementary and high school students.

Nia Gabrielle

Nia, a graduate of the Odyssey Project first year and Bridge Course programs, is an artist and a personal coach for artists and other creative types.

Magnificent Seed

When asked why poor people were poor, Viniece Walker, a maximum security prison inmate, told Earl Shorris that they lacked “the moral life of downtown” which included exposure to “plays, museums, concerts, [and] lectures.” Earl Shorris took this seed of information and founded the Clemente Course in the Humanities.

I am always amazed by people who are able to build amazing lives, gardens, cities, businesses, and more humane societies with seeds given them, especially when the builders themselves come from less than hospitable circumstances. The idea that reflection and beauty, not money, creates riches was a bold and unique concept to put into practice in 1995. Those who felt ostracized and mistreated by society at large found dignity and respect not only in the Clemente Course but also in conversations with Earl. You could believe you were capable of brilliance and wealth far more than the money you wished you had. Earl was a true leader in that he was not afraid to teach and share leadership with anyone willing to learn and put those leadership skills into practice.

My experience with the Odyssey Project (OP) was and is bittersweet. Freedom for its participants is the goal of the OP. Earl once remarked that there were those he had to turn away from the first Clemente Course because they were too poor, and I sometimes wonder if I was too poor to participate in that first OP course in Chicago. The biggest obstacle to freedom and wealth is fear. The OP experience gave me plenty of seed, but I also possessed an overabundance of fear, and so it was years before I was willing to plant and nurture that seed – too many years. Earl himself was quite courageous. He went to college with a bunch of adults at 13, was a bullfighter in his 20s, and navigated the shark-infested waters of advertising before becoming a novelist and a social critic, and also before founding the Clemente Course with the seed of an idea.

The stories, poems, and essays you’ll be reading in this magazine are a result of our peers growing and becoming ever more radiant because they are nurturing and planting seed obtained from their OP experience.

Is the surround of force forcing you back into the cave? Are you afraid to step out into the light of the sun? If you are a graduate of the Odyssey Project Clemente Course in the Humanities, you have been given enough seed to build a garden, a city, a business, a more humane society, or simply a life far greater than the one you lived yesterday. I hope you take that seed, plant it in the soil that you have, and with all the courage you can muster, let the rain and sunlight nurture what you have planted so that you can grow into your magnificence.

Nia Gabrielle
August 20, 2012

In Memory of Earl Shorris

Founder of the *Clemente Course in the Humanities*

Odyssey graduates share their memories of Earl Shorris, who passed away this May. His belief in the power of the humanities led to his founding of the Clemente Course in the Humanities and the OP.

*Our joys will be greater
Our love will be deeper
Our lives will be fuller
Because we shared your moment*

This poem says it all – Earl Shorris was the kindest, most humbling man I have ever met. But, he had a strong desire and determination to reach out to people, to teach, and to promote the need for lifelong learning among the poor. It's this kind of exhilarating passion for educating the under-privileged that he will most likely be remembered for.

To say that Mr. Shorris, Earl he liked being called, had a passion for education is like saying the sun is hot, an understatement. I don't know anyone else with such zeal to teach his fellow man and with a strong desire for the impoverished to be introduced to and learn to love the classics as well as what it means to be a citizen as much as he did. I believe it was this strong appeal that led him to found the *Clemente Course for the Humanities*.

I don't know how many lives Earl touched with his awakening to the needs of society, but I know he drastically changed my life for the better. In 2000 (the Odyssey pilot project was initiated at the Illinois Humanities Council) at that time I was able to take the Odyssey Project Course, then the Bridge Course in 2002. What I learned in these two courses has changed my whole perspective on life, liberty, the pursuit of education, and my responsibility to my fellow man.

Because of the Odyssey Project I have read and written essays – yes, I have written essays – on some pretty memorable classics. Being a 64 year old woman, it's embarrassing to admit that during my formative years in the Chicago Public School System I had never written an essay and didn't know what an argument was (other than a confrontation) before taking this course. But now, I can formulate a compelling argument for such classics as *Heart of Darkness*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

What I will remember most about Earl is his determination to bring a lasting cultural experience to the lives of those less fortunate. Thanks to Earl, when I'm in the company of scholarly folks and/or well-read co-workers and associates, I no longer feel inadequate, left out or confused by the conversation. In fact, I can join in and contribute to the conversation. In addition, I have a strong desire to continue my education; and I realize learning is not only done in the traditional classroom setting, but through day-to-day experiences and opportunities. Because of his method of teaching and awareness training, I can recognize learning opportunities all around me.

I am extremely grateful for having the opportunity to meet Earl when he visited the ODYSSEY Project in Chicago. But more importantly, I am grateful for the life and courage of conviction that was embodied in Mr. Earl Shorris. Undoubtedly, he was a gift to society due to his dedication to making the world a better place.

--EJ Hendricks, 2002

El mereser vivir para todo ser humano es valido, como el morir para algunos que sufren, el se mudo a ese sitio angelical porque es su lugar, pocos nacen para morir y el es uno de ellos, te vamos extrañar.

--Gerardo Miranda, generación 2012

I met Earl through a church that was trying to open an Odyssey Course in Ghana, West Africa. I want to say that I have met a great man of faith. He tried to bring the OP to Africa; it has not happened yet. I am sure that in the event it happens, it will be dedicated to his hard work. I went on from Odyssey and received my BA, Masters of Divinity, and am working towards my PhD in Pastoral Counseling. The Odyssey Project put me back on the track toward my doctorate. I thank God for Mr. Shorris and the Odyssey Project. May he rest in peace. God bless you all for your great work

--Rev. Sheena Hunter, 2008



In Memory of Earl Shorris

1936 - 2012

From UChicago Core: "Shorris Remembered"

The story about the Odyssey Project ("Free Thinking," Winter 2012) was a wonderful tribute to Earl Shorris, X'53, the man who founded the Clemente Course in the Humanities, of which the Odyssey Project is a part. It is with profound sadness that I write to let your readers know that Earl lost his long battle with non-Hodgkins lymphoma on Sunday, May 27. But all who knew Earl realize how hard it is to capture the special magic of that extraordinary man, a Renaissance man if ever there was one.

Perhaps the best tributes will come from the many adult learners who have had their lives transformed by the Clemente Course/Odyssey Project, and their voices are the ones that Earl would have most wanted to hear. He received many awards during his lifetime – in addition to the National Humanities Medal, he was honored with the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle, a very special distinction – and his books and articles have often met with wide acclaim. (See, for example, *Under the Fifth Sun*, *The Life and Times of Mexico*, and *New American Blues*, works of which he was especially proud.) But his greatest work, in his eyes, was the Clemente Course/Odyssey Project and its success in providing "riches for the poor," as another of his works put it.

He loved the article in the *Core* – writing to me, "What a great cheering article that was!" – largely because in it one could hear the voices of the Odyssey students and feel the excitement of the humanities in action. He was a great friend of the University's Civic Knowledge Project, and all of us at the CKP will miss him. He taught freedom, like no one else we have ever known.

– Bart Schultz, Civic Knowledge Project Director

Thank you for your lovely article on the Odyssey Project. I think Carrie Golus captured the spirit of the class very well – especially in the felicitous designation "its intriguing mixture of elitism and populism." The only thing missing was a mention of our partner, Bard College, which has been granting credit to graduates of the Clemente Courses since the late 1990s.

After Earl Shorris died at the end of last month, I received a number of notes from former students in the project, and I would like to share a couple of them.

"The unique thing that Earl offered the world is he took time to ask *why*? Why are people poor? It's not that others don't ask questions, but most people judge before they ask. Maybe they are afraid of the responses, or of the truth – who knows? But like Earl, I believe it's important to take the time and ask the right questions."

"Mr. Shorris's contribution to a just humanity and to sharing the wonders of the 'moral life of downtown' with low-wage earners, single mothers, and just everyday people is a legacy that will not be forgotten. My odyssey still continues and so will Earl Shorris."

"Because of [the Odyssey Project], I had the pleasure of meeting a legend."

And this from a teacher: "I admire Earl's work, and I feel blessed that I had the opportunity to meet him. He changed the lives of many people around the world, including mine, which has been enriched since teaching with Odyssey."

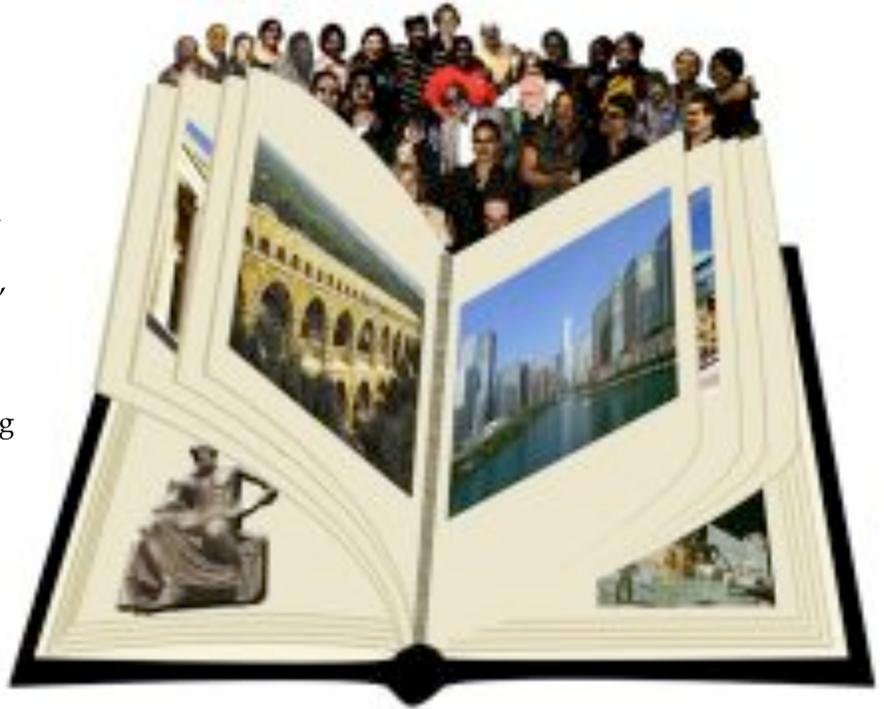
It has been my privilege to work with the Odyssey Project since 2000, when Earl Shorris came to Chicago to get the first course started here. At the time, I was teaching in the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults in the Graham School and tutoring adult literacy at the Blue Gargoyle, wishing the Blue Gargoyle students had the same opportunities for reflection and discussion that the Basic Program students had. I couldn't figure out how to do it, but Earl did.

– Amy Thomas Elder, Odyssey Project Director

Cover Art Contest

Odyssey graduates were invited to submit their original artwork to the Cover Art Contest. After receiving and reviewing over thirty submissions of photography, paintings, and drawings, we happily present this publication with **cover art by graduate Pennie Brinson**. Her piece, entitled, "Blue Abstract" is created with oil paint using a painting knife technique. She is now the proud owner of an iPod Shuffle!

To display the talents of the Odyssey community, here we present some contending submissions.



"An Odyssey To Bridge The Gaps"
Kathy Fitzgerald, Bridge Course 2009



"La mentira de la verdad la mentira"
Gerardo Miranda, Spanish Course 2012



"Green Abstract"
Pennie Brinson, Bridge Course 2003

Alumni Spotlight: Valerie Walston

Recent Odyssey Graduate from the Bridge Course, Valerie Walston, shares her experiences with the Project and its impact on her family life in an in-person interview. Valerie has continued to stay involved in the Odyssey Project by regularly attending the Summer Writing Workshops and was chosen to deliver a graduation speech for her class at the 2012 ceremony.

OP: What brought you to the Odyssey Project?

I was looking for an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to take college courses, and, of course, at no charge. That was a great incentive. I left college early because I was ill and got distracted and never returned, but always realized the need and had the desire to pursue a higher education. I had often considered a city college as a means to achieve that goal and had even taken some non-credited courses there, but I couldn't seem to make the commitment. But when I saw an ad soliciting candidates for the Odyssey Project, I thought God had answered my prayers.

I come from an educated family and my children were in school at the time – my son was in graduate school at the University of California and my daughter was an art history major at Oberlin College. That was a motivator, particularly with my daughter, because she's an intellectual and it was interesting having conversations with her. They both had higher expectations for me, because they knew I was capable and I always instilled the need for education, so it was like, "Well, why aren't you doing something, Mom?" My high regard for my children along with the opportunity presenting itself prompted me to finally make a move. I mean, how can you pass up on an opportunity like this? Not knowingly.

OP: Has your relationship with your children been affected at all by your experiences in Odyssey?

With my son, it's probably given me a little bit more credibility. I don't think he understood the



Valerie Walston delivers her moving speech at the 2012 graduation

depth of the program or the significance until the recent graduation. He attended the graduation from the first course, but I don't think it resonated. With the Bridge Course, and maybe with maturity on his part, he understood it a little better and appreciated it a little better. After having gone to many ceremonies himself and of other people, he was really moved by the (recent) ceremony for the Odyssey Project. He liked the depth and the sincerity of the program directors as well as the students. He was really moved by that.

With my daughter, the intellect, (my participation in the Odyssey Project) allowed me to speak more intelligently as far as art history is concerned. She's well travelled and has participated in a lifestyle of art and conversation. We were just able to have a better discourse with me having some of the background. As a matter of fact, we were sharing books at one time. She borrowed my art history book and never returned it! That signifies something.

OP: What made you decide to take the Bridge Course last year?

I wanted to remain active, (I missed) the interactions with the students, and to just learn more. To learn as much as I possibly can. And to let this be a conduit to, perhaps, the DePaul program – the New School of Learning. I'm interested in either Marketing or Early Childhood Education.

OP: Could you talk a little bit about your graduation speech?

The opportunity to take care of my terminally ill mother was the greatest experience I've had in life. As I said in my speech, when I needed someone, The Odyssey Project was there for me. After being just exhausted emotionally and physically after taking care of my mom, no one could fill that need or that void in my family – only this program could. I often think about how you pass without realizing some of your dreams, and I guess with my mom passing that helped motivate me. I don't necessarily feel that she lived without realizing her dreams; I know that she was fiercely proud of her children. But I don't recall her speaking of her dreams. In other words, I think she settled. She was terribly smart and I think she accomplished so much, not having a formal education. She was very resilient, highly motivated and highly admired by everyone she met. She was also an amputee, which made her a great inspiration, as she was an anomaly – a physically beautiful

woman missing her right hand. She was a single mom. My dad died when I was very, very young, so she raised 5 children with this handicap. She was my hero. I know that my mom had to have passed without realizing some of her more important dreams, and I just didn't want to repeat that. Hopefully I will remain on track to obtain my degree. It's on my bucket list. But there are so many distractions in life and so many reasons why you don't do things. I need the encouragement and the support of the Odyssey Project, so I really need to stay connected and I will.

OP: What made you decide to take the Bridge Course last year?

I would like for the Odyssey Project to offer an Associate's degree. Fewer students would be able to participate in such a program due to resources and budgetary constraints but it would be more substantive. It would inspire a greater commitment and provide a more indelible accomplishment. An Associate's degree would have a greater impact in the student's life and perhaps that of the Odyssey Project. There would be a renewed interest in the program and the donors will receive a greater bang for their buck. Lives will change through better job opportunities. The degree would also facilitate the transition to institutions of higher learning for a bachelor's degree.

Faculty Spotlight: Hilary Strang



We caught up with Odyssey faculty member, Hilary Strang, who teaches Critical Thinking and Writing at the North side campus.

In this compelling, in-person interview, Hilary shares her thoughts on higher education, the relationship between humanities scholarship and political struggle against injustice, and why the Odyssey Project is “a version of school that’s better than school in so many ways.”

OP: Tell us about your academic background. How is it that you became interested in pursuing scholarship in the humanities?

HS: When I went to college I thought that I wanted to write poetry and I sort of vaguely thought that after college was over I might become a social worker. I felt that I had two interests, and one of them was about loving reading and writing and ideas, and that was the poetry side of things, and the other side was being concerned about social injustice and inequality.

I was lucky that when I was in college, I learned that those two interests were not actually two separate things; that those two interests were actually part of the same intellectual project, and also a project in living and trying to find a way to be an effective and good human being. That was both revelatory to me and changed my life. Realizing that the world of written stuff and made stuff is not separate from the world of political struggle—that actually those are part of the same thing. I grew up in Hyde Park, which is both full of intellectuals and is full of a lot of very politically active people. And yet somehow the world of thought, which the university represented, always seemed to me completely

separate from the world of struggle and work against injustice. Those seemed like two entirely separate things, and I’m happy that I learned that, actually, those two things might really have something very intense to do with each other.

OP: How is teaching Odyssey different from your other classroom experiences?

HS: I’ve been very lucky in all my teaching. I’ve gotten lots of opportunities to teach lots of different kinds of people who are very smart and very engaged, and that is always awesome. Odyssey classes, because everybody who’s there wants to be there, because they’ve chosen it, and because they’ve made real and often really difficult commitments to being there, those are classes of people where the level of motivation in the room is very, very high and that means the level of discussion is very high and the energy in the room is very high. Sometimes teachers talk about how there’s this big problem in your class when you have people who have a wide range of different levels of preparation, but I actually think that that’s one of the things that makes teaching really interesting and compelling, and it’s one of the things I really like about teaching Odyssey classes. People come from an incredibly wide range of

backgrounds; they have an amazingly various set of relationships to what it means to be in school, to read, to think, to write. That's not a detriment to the class. I actually think that's a really exciting and productive part of those classes, and part of that is because Odyssey students don't pretend that they all come from the same place. Everybody brings their story and their complexity and their different kinds of intelligence with them, and everybody acknowledges that in class. We all have the same text in front of us and we're asking questions of the text together. That's a really great idea for what a class should be like. In most college classes, it's very rarely like that. I think Odyssey classes really are like that – they really can be a place where people coming from multiple different kinds of locations and backgrounds come together and ask questions together, and seriously engage with ideas. The kind of diversity of the students that we have in Odyssey – that's just the best teaching experience that you can have. You have this room full of people who bring their own individuality to the room and are also willing to put that aside in order to really grapple with the texts that are in front of them. It's very intellectually rich.

OP: The life of a scholar can at times be very isolated. Beyond personal enrichment, how can studying the humanities positively impact communities?

HS: One of the students in my Odyssey class this year said he felt like he had come to Odyssey interested in his own participation, and he was pretty skeptical about how interested he was in hearing other people's opinions. He said that by the end of the year he had realized that it wasn't about either "I'm right and you're wrong" or "you're right and I'm wrong," but that instead, (it was about) experiencing a field of negotiation among people in which you really do have to learn how to very actively listen to what other



Odyssey Instructors Hilary Strang, Robert Buerglener, Adam Davis and Curt Hansman attend the 2010 graduation ceremony

people say and not be threatened by what they're saying, but also not put aside what you think.

Ideally one of the reasons that school is a good place, although it's rarely like this, but, *ideally* one of the reasons that school is a good place, is because it's supposed to be a place in which we move from our own opinions into complicated and well-reasoned dialogue with one another that isn't necessarily about "there are two sides to every question," but that any question can take multiple, multiple different kinds of forms. I think that working on those kinds of processes – on the processes of active listening – those are skills and techniques and habits of thought, and also habits of living, too, that I think *do* very much play roles in all kinds of community engagement. Those are kinds of things that translate from, yeah, what *can* be the sort of isolation of intellectual work into various kinds of community engagement. There still isn't any easy path from intellectual work into solving problems, but I think the practice of talking, of being ready to talk, and also of knowing that you are somebody who has something that is worth saying, is incredibly important. I think lots of our Odyssey students already come in knowing this stuff, and Odyssey can just reinforce it for them, but knowing that you know how to ask

questions, that you can read carefully, that you are good at listening and talking to people, is also a way to keep yourself from being somebody who is passive in the face of the political discourse that's circulating around you. When somebody says, "Well, there's nothing we can do about this form of injustice," the more critical consciousness you have, the less willing you are to accept that and the more willing you are to engage actively to try to get other people to hear what it is that you think, what it is that you know. I think that those are very real things; they're still abstract, but I do think that those are pretty real and important effects that education can have. The people who are brave enough to really commit themselves to the kind of education that asks you to think critically (are) also brave enough to go out into the world and try to keep fostering that with other people.

OP: Do you have any advice you would like to give graduates of the Odyssey Project? What do you hope they will take away from their experiences?

Something that is so great about Odyssey is that it's like a version of school that's better than school in so many ways, because everybody is there because they want to be there. And that is the faculty and the students. We engage freely and openly and we respect each other and we have very few bureaucratic structures in place. And it's free. All of those things make the Odyssey classes the remarkable things that they are. Post-Odyssey if you want to go ahead and get a 2-year degree or a 4-year degree, you encounter a lot more bureaucracy, and you encounter problems, in particular the problems of money. So many of our Odyssey students already have student loan debt from earlier moments. These things are real problems and they're not negligible. Lots of people can get themselves together and decide that they're going to commit to a year of Odyssey, but that requires a lot of sacrifice. Continuing to make those sacrifices is something that's really, really hard to do. The basic thing that I would say is

to keep seeking out support, including the kind of support that Odyssey wants to give its alums in helping them figure out what they want to do next, helping them move into doing more college work if that's what they want to do.

In the United States, education isn't a right, but it ought to be a right. The feeling I hope that most Odyssey students have is that those classes give them a chance to know that they are intellectuals, to know that they are people who think about the world, who make meaning in the world, who actively process the world, and who deserve to keep on doing that. We don't make our students into intellectuals; they come to us as intellectuals, and I think what we try to do is to reinforce that.

What I hope is that through whatever next steps there are for Odyssey students, they're able to carry that sense of themselves with them. They all deserve to get the kind of education that they want—god knows they all deserve to get the jobs that they want, too. But specifically in thinking about what further education there is, that's something that everybody deserves. It ought to be a right, and the difficulties and struggles of that should not crush that sense of yourself *as* an intellectual, *as* somebody who is already doing the best part of the kind of work that you get to do in school. It would be great if Odyssey wasn't just a year; if it could be a college. If this was the principle on which schools were actually run. And it's not. And so what I hope, anyway, is that our students carry with them the sense of accomplishment and the sense of they're own deservingness out of Odyssey and into the rest of the stuff that they do.

Academic Essays

“Proving Freedom of Speech and Freedom From Fear When No One Believed It Could Be Done”

Monica Brewer

Champagne-Urbana, Spring 2012

The autobiography *Black Boy* by Richard Wright takes you from his formative years to his adult life. I will take a deeper look at the meaning of Wright being able to express himself freely on paper. Wright's experiences with reading and writing were negative when it came to family and friends. It is my belief that in his formative years he felt the need to freely express himself on paper or read freely, even though his friends and family were against his writing. By examining specific scenes from Wright's early life, I will show how Wright expressed himself in the absence of personal relations through writing and how reading, writing, and – further than that – literacy were a form of freedom and liberation for Wright.

In the absence of personal relations, Wright turned to reading and writing to express himself. He did this even though his friends stopped him from expressing himself. I will give you examples of this. While he was in his room, he authored a story called “The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre” (BB, 167). The story was published in the “local *Negro* newspaper” (BB, 165). His friends and family thought Wright's writing was not a freedom, and his friends and family were out to diminish him and criticize him for choosing to use certain words to express himself. Wright's classmates attacked him verbally, wanting to know why he wrote the story and where he got it from (BB, 167). He clearly told them that “nobody” told him to do it. He did it on his own. His Grandmother, who was very religious, was appalled with his work and felt that it was “the Devil's work” (BB, 168). When Wright's Auntie Addie found out, she said, “it was a sin for anyone to use the word ‘hell’” (BB, 168). These negative statements show us that not only were his classmates against Wright

expressing himself freely, but the people closest to him who cared about him, like his Grandmother and Auntie, were opposed to his work and were very strong in believing that it was not something to be written about. Wright was not liberated to express himself and get the recognition he deserved, due to their criticism. This resulted in him feeling angry. He “was so angry that he refused to talk about the story” (BB, 168).

Wright would read in secret in order to explore new material without restrictions from family or friends. Wright stated, “When I was not called on to recite, I read tattered, second-hand copies of Flynn's *Detective Weekly* or the *Argosy All Story Magazine*” (BB, 133). Reading secretly gave him a sense of accomplishment and internal freedom. More evidence of Wright reading in secret was apparent when he was selling a local paper. During this time, when he returned home at night, “I would go to my room and lock the door and revel in outlandish exploits of outlandish men in faraway, outlandish cities” (BB, 129). Because Wright's behavior refers to him not being able to read in front of his family, he was restricted to reading in hiding. Even though he wasn't free to read in front of others, reading in secret was an outlet for Wright, which led him to freedom. He offered, “For the first time in my life I became aware of the life of modern world, of vast cities, and I was claimed by it: I loved it” (BB, 129). This statement supports my claim that Wright was truly free in these moments; he has freedom and is exhilarated by pursuing an opening into the world, giving him peace of mind in his heart where no one can take that away from him.

Even as Wright's literacy was liberating, it also led to controversy. Wright was selected to give the valedictorian speech but was faced with opposition when he met with the principal of the school. Wright came prepared with a speech that took hours to prepare when the

Academic Essays

principal called him to his office to give him “a stack of stapled sheets [...] the speech he was to say the night of graduation” (BB, 174). Wright had already taken time to indite his speech for graduation. The principal wanted to limit his literacy. No matter what stood in Wright's way, he was determined to write and deliver what he was writing. Wright was exerting what Foner calls “essential human freedom” – the freedom of speech – when he took the liberty to impart his speech. This shows that will power is strong, because even when you are told you can't accomplish something, you can, even in the face of controversy. Wright is a powerful human being by standing up for what he believes and following through on his heart's desires.

In conclusion, I believe Wright's struggles that he embarked upon literacy clearly indicate what it means to exercise “freedom of speech” (Foner, 835). Wright's persistence to read gave him the knowledge and the keys to perfect his writing. His persistence in itself was Wright's freedom, and he felt liberated when he was writing. Although Wright's experiences with his family and friends were negative, his reading and writing

presented bigger truths. In *Black Boy*, Wright displays determination to excel in secret by persevering and writing from his heart as he read with ease.

Roosevelt spoke eloquently of a future world order founded on the “*essential human freedom*,” one being freedom from fear (Foner, 835). Wright shows us how “freedom from fear” should be handled and how to express oneself when it seems life is most difficult. Fear never played a role in his determination to succeed. However being paralyzed by fear can limit the extent of one's success if they allow it to overtake them. Wright was able to channel the fear into a positive light and overcome life's difficulties.

Wright didn't seem to let the negativity of personal relations get in the way of his accomplishments; instead he used his writing to express himself. He stepped into unfamiliar territory when he used words that would invoke anger in his family and friends. Wright's reading in secret was in itself what lead him to persevere down avenues of enrichment with due diligence, leading him to his passion of writing from his heart.

“Born This Way: An Apology For Evil” (*excerpt*)

Juan Louis Tafolla
Critical Thinking & Writing
North Side, Spring 2012

You are not good. Me neither. I can lie, envy, despise, judge, injure or hate. Sometimes I can be a really good person. On other occasions, the devil smiles. I am the criminal and I am the saint. I am human. This essay is a defense of human beings. An argument about how evil makes us human. My theme is the nature of the human. I ask my readers to 1) understand and accept this dark side, 2) make a reconciliation of their capacity for good and evil and, 3) take responsibility for their evil. In order to do this, I

suggest certain topics for reflection that are related to defining the human being as multiple selves; the struggle between good with evil, evil as natural, the pleasures of evil, and morality and conscience.

I am going to illustrate my points of view through the intense novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, published in 1886. This fantastic short story is an understanding of human nature. It is one of the best stories about the complexity of humanity with fascinating insights into man's character. This captivating story of the dual nature of good and evil in man follows Dr. Jekyll, a respectable and amiable doctor who roams the black alleys of London

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satisfying various undisclosed pleasures when he is transformed into Mr. Hyde.

Before starting, it is important to try to specify the binaries of good/evil and morals/ethics. To explain my meaning of evil, I want to describe its opposite. Good is related to the ideal and virtuous: moderation, love, consideration, honor, charity, peace, forgiveness, prudence, humility, friendliness, generosity, sincerity, honesty, tolerance, etc. Therefore, evil builds up from anger, hate, selfishness, corruption, envy, avarice, cruelty, greed, hypocrisy, etc. On the other hand, the difference between morals and ethics is that morals are the generally accepted standards of behavioral codes within the society at a point in time, while ethics is the personal reasoning of the principles used to decide what behaviors are good. In other words, morality is to accept and act in the way others say is good and ethics is to think, reflect, speak truthfully, consider the consequences of our actions and omissions, and evaluate and make decisions by ourselves about what is good and how we should act.

Double, triple, quadruple... multiple beings: "a hard law of life."

We have trouble truly seeing ourselves as we are. We attempt to decorate our basic human image. The central theme of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is the strong sense of man's double being, which at times comes in upon and overwhelms the mind of every thinking creature. Man is homo ambiguous! In the Stevenson's novel, Jekyll is the victim of a flawed assumption about human nature. It is that character that says clearly: "man is not truly one, but truly two." (55). Jekyll continues this statement and clarifies that other persons could be more than two: "I say two, because of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, other will outstrip me on the same

lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens." (56). Multiple personalities inhabit us all. Many thinkers, like Nietzsche and Freud, have supposed that humans have difficulty seeing ourselves as we truly are, our many "denizens," because of our powerful tendency to want to picture ourselves in the most flattering way possible, which requires dishonesty.¹

Black and white: a suicide war.

Each of us is good and each of us is evil. We possess selfish and benevolent impulses. We have a virtuous side, but we also have to consider other sides of our nature, like the devilish one. "All human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil". (58). Man is a composite being, a mixture of good and bad (the extremes of our beings). It is important to remark that Jekyll recognizes that while Hyde is pure evil, Jekyll is not pure good. After the experiment, he remains what he was before: "I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair." (59). Jekyll is a complex combination of good and evil, but with a public face that appears to be absolutely respectable.

In every human there occurs a war between these members. Man must maintain a constant struggle of good with evil. "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," a tragedy of doubleness, exemplifies a very attractive way to combat this. "This consciousness of the perennial war among my members...It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together – that in the agonized womb of consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling" (55, 56). "Strange as my circumstances were, the terms of this debate are as old and commonplace as man;

much the same inducements and alarms cast the die for any tempted and trembling sinner" (63).

The agony of this brawl between good and evil and duty and temptation could break our nerves. The only exit for a person thus plagued, as offered by the story, is suicide. Dr. Jekyll, after his sincere confession, decides to finish his life. "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end." (70). When Jekyll finally destroys Hyde, he must destroy Jekyll, too. Jekyll discovers that the two sides of humankind are, in fact, inseparable and that the attempt to disassociate the good from the bad is folly. According to Lloyd J. Averill, in his book *The Problem of Being Human*, "The problematic in man is the unwillingness on the part of men to accept their ambiguous, and hence problematic, nature. Life at its most effective can be lived only where men find the courage to affirm all of the varied dimensions of their humanness...It is the denial of these vital dimensions which has led to that flatness in human life."¹

Conclusion.

There is no total consensus yet about how to define a human being. We are not self-transparent. It is exceedingly difficult to know the truth about our nature because we are extraordinarily complex. The human being is a multifaceted and unusual animal with compounds of different elements. The sum of these parts is what a human being is.

The problematic in men is the unwillingness on their part to accept their ambiguous, and hence problematic, nature. We have certain natural dispositions towards evil. That capacity for evil exists in the most generous of natures. Indeed, life at its most effective can be lived only where men find the courage to affirm all of the varied dimensions of their human nature. It is the denial of these vital dimensions that has led to flatness in human life.¹ We need to find the balance between good and evil; a communion, because

evil is natural and irremediable.

Robert L. Stevenson was writing about the susceptibility to the devil as inherent in humanity itself. His story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde can be used to argue that restraint is good, and that society requires it to survive. But it seems to me that the story shows that if you limit yourself it just makes it worse. We have to relieve our natural evil and at the same time evaluate and moderate some of our evil desires. We have to use ethics as a way to judge our pleasures. We have capacities to modify and control how we live. We are responsible, nobody else, for our actions.

I particularly consider the most important characteristics of a human to be its capacity for being rational and conscious. The ability to think, including consciousness, makes sense of life. Meaning for life is an implication of the value of what we are and what we do. It requires that we make certain conceptions and decisions about what is right and wrong, good and bad, and what leads to happiness, flourishing, and contentment: ethics. We discover in ourselves more than simply the need to survive and reproduce, but the need to flourish. This requires that we think about what we ought to do to live in a group: ethics as ecology. We have to find our meaning and purpose in a "home with neighbors". A human is a very smart and superior animal that deliberates, reasons, and chooses.

Finally, we can make the best possible world by taking into account our evil nature. We cannot have a perfect world, because we are not completely good. Because of our unbalanced nature, we have a disturbed world. I admire humans because they have achieved something so difficult and challenging like making a world a habitat. Yes, it is probably the best planet because it is not possible for there to be a perfect one when humans are those who inhabit it. It is very often that instinct prevails over reason. The beast is always there, inside you and me.



Monica Brewer, Champaign-Urbana 2012: "Toxic Communication"

In her visual essay on Hamlet, Monica discusses the deadly nature of communication, highlighting the consequences of verbal interactions between characters in Shakespeare's play as well as in society at large.

"I believe the power of words reaches far beyond *Hamlet*. Our words have the power to build another up or tear them down. Words have the power to impact another's life in a positive way. Yet the wrong word spoken at the wrong moment can truly ruin a person for a lifetime, even to the point of death. The moral of the story in *Hamlet* is a life lesson we can all take away. And that is to be mindful of your words as each word you utter has POWER" (13).

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"Interested"

Pennie Brinson
Bridge Course, 2003

Hey, Mister
 Can you have interest in my words?
 They go together quite well
 I think they ought to be heard
 I could bring them tomorrow
 And we could have a rehearsal
 I want to hear them as a jingle
 On a commercial.

Hey, Mister
 Can you have interest in my play?
 It's gonna be a big hit
 With the public someday.
 It's a masterpiece written by me
 Some time ago
 I want to see it
 Performed in a variety show.

Hey, Mister
 Can you have interest in my song?
 It's a jazzy melody
 And I know it belongs.
 It's gonna end up a classic
 Recorded by everybody
 I want to hear my song soon
 Sung by anybody.

Hey, Mister
 Can you have interest in my writings?
 They can soothe any mind
 Or can be very exiting
 They're a great bunch of words
 That's gonna go very far
 I want to hear them used someday
 By a superstar.

Hey, Mister ...
 Hey, Mister ...
 Hey, Mister?

"I Write What I Know"

Rita Falcon
West Side, 2001

Wounds from the Past
 Much too long to Last

Stay with me always.....

I write what I Know,
 What I've experienced
 Has helped me Grow

Into the Woman I am Today
 But who exactly is this Lady?

When I was **Six**
 I became an Adult
 No longer a Kid

When I was **Twelve**
 I began to Rebel

At **Seventeen**
 I dated
 My future husband

By **Eighteen**
 I would become,
 Pregnant

Nineteen I welcomed my
 First Daughter
 By **Twenty-Two**
 My son would be named
 After his father

I write what I Know,
 What I've experienced
 Has helped me Grow

Twenty-Five
 Would be divorce Time
 Then another daughter
 At **Twenty-Nine**

By my **Thirties** I vowed to be Fit!
 I did just that rather Quick!

No longer with the father
 Of my last Child
 I set out to go buck wild!

I did just That!
 What I set out to Do.
 In Between
 I threw Myself
 Back into School!

By **Thirty-Six**
 I would get Engaged
 By **Thirty-Seven**
 There'd be no wedding.

I tried once Again
 With, I thought
 Was my friend

But another failed mission
 Would be that
 Realization.

After I hit **Thirty-Nine**
 I gave LOVE and Trust
 Another Try

To no Avail
 LOVE and Trust
 Only Hinted to
 Prevail

I write what I Know,
 What I've experienced
 Has helped me Grow

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"Por fin llegó la noche"**Marco García****Spanish Course, 2012**

Por fin llegó la noche,
 Todos a descansar,
 bueno, los que puedan,
 yo no puedo,
 por eso,
 mientras ustedes duermen
 yo voy a declamar,
 espero que no los vaya a despertar
 o más bien al revés.

Por fin llegó la noche,
 El político se quita la corbata de mentiras
 con la que intenta engañar a la gente todos los días.

Por fin llegó la noche,
 El abogado se quita los sucios zapatos
 con los que pisotea la ley,
 que el hombre ha inventado,
 y la justicia,
 que no conoce a pesar de ser letrado,
 y no hablo aquí de todos,
 solo de los que les quede el saco.

Por fin llegó la noche,
 El oficial de inmigración se quita el uniforme
 arrugado
 con el que pretende esconder sus complejos y su
 miedo,
 que es mucho más grande que la desgracia de los
 hombres, mujeres y niños
 que diariamente son deportados.

Por fin llegó la noche,
 El honorable juez se quita la injusta bata y la cuelga e
 el perchero,
 la misma bata con la que será juzgado
 porque con el mismo dedo que señalas serás
 señalado,
 verdadera y justa ley.

"She's Doing the Best That She Can"**Valerie Walston****Bridge Course, 2012**

She's as rigid as rigor mortis;
 but as balanced as the scales of Libra.
 Making her as "mad" as Sybil;
 but with the heart of Mother Teresa.

"Storm"**Carolyn Roundtree****Bridge Course, 2012**

We cast about for months
 On an angry sea
 Stabilizing ourselves with rituals
 Steeling our backbones with
 Euphemisms, Religious Sayings,
 Ancestral Wisdom
 Wringing them bone dry
 I only asked why once.

Por fin llegó la noche,
 El obrero termina su jornada de trabajo,
 y descansa.
 Por fin alguien puede,
 y mientras se duerme entre plegarias, bostezo y
 cansancio,
 el obrero se pregunta:
 Si le llaman mojado a todo aquel que cruza un
 pequeño charco, descalzo,
 ¿cómo entonces llamaremos a todos aquellos que
 cruzaron un inmenso océano en barcos?

En fin, que descansen los que puedan,
 los que la consciencia se los permita,
 los demás que sigan dormidos.

Por fin llegó la noche.

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"En la Ciudad de Doubler"

Juan Luis Tafolla, North Side, 2012

Al llegar al aeropuerto de *Doubler*, se sentía un clima grato. El tiempo era placentero. El mejor regalo después de un viaje. La terminal era gigantesca hasta convertirse en una fiera. Pasillos formando laberintos, salas de espera, aduanas, personas corriendo, oficiales, tiendas y sitios para el control de seguridad formaban un monstruo. El área de reclamo de equipaje estaba insólitamente formada por una decena de carruseles, una librería, una cafetería, una tienda de recuerdos de la ciudad y una oficina de renta de vehículos. La cafetería tenía un par de mesas en el exterior donde la gente que recogía sus maletas se tropezaba con las mesas. Había una mujer rubia sentada, con un café en una mano y un libro en la otra, cubriéndole la cara. En la portada del volumen se alcanzaban a distinguir las palabras *Pamela y la virtud recompensada*. Sin duda, era ella. Mi Pamela. Nuevamente la descubría leyendo el mismo libro. Me escondí detrás de un kiosco de propaganda, no tuve que esperar mucho para que ella diera el paso. Dejó el libro y la taza en la mesa. Sacó de su bolso una mascada para cubrirse parte de la cara y unos lentes oscuros. Caminó hacia las bandas de equipajes. Físicamente era una mujer común. Del tipo de esas que te enamoras, sin darte cuenta, por su simpatía y su ternura. Dio un par de vueltas. Examinó mochilas, un par de valijas, pidió disculpas a una persona por inspeccionar su maleta, fue a otro carrusel, leyó clandestinamente las etiquetas, buscaba información, por fin detectó lo que le interesaba y lanzó la mano con fuerza hacia el maletín como si se tratara de atrapar un pescado en un río. Lo agarró y se disparó hacia la cafetería. Ahí desapareció. Una media hora después volvió sin la mascada y sin los lentes. Al mismo tiempo, del otro lado, un hombre se quejaba sobre la pérdida de su equipaje. Pamela, o cualquiera que sea su nombre, se sentó, le tomó al café y volvió a concentrarse en su lectura.

Abrir la maleta, esta vez, le había sido fácil. Otras veces tenía que forzar el candado, cortar las telas, agujerar con taladro las tapas, o descifrar los

códigos de seguridad. Un par de veces, éstos eran el mismo número de la dirección que venía en la etiqueta o los mismos dígitos repetidos cuatro veces. Esta vez, simplemente apretó un botón y el tesoro estaba abierto. Un par de camisas azules y blancas. Una corbata roja. Unos zapatos negros lustrosos. Calcetines grises, ropa interior blanca y una loción. Admiró cada prenda. Acarició la seda de la corbata. Tomó la loción y proyectó el atomizador hacia su cuello. Oía a cedro. Suspiró. Se imaginó un hombre ejecutivo, educado, maduro, alto, de pelo oscuro con un par de canas. Le gustaba lo que todo eso podía ser. Cerró la maleta y le arrancó la etiqueta con los datos del propietario de su propietario. Escondió el equipaje detrás de unas cajas de azúcar, salió de la bodega y cerró la puerta con llave. Se sentía segura de que todo estaba bien una vez más. Lo que ella no sabía, desafortunadamente, es que afuera había un hombre espiándola.

La esperé afuera de la terminal hasta el anochecer. Fueron saliendo los empleados, apagándose las luces y escuchándose unos pasos. Pamela cerraba la cafetería. Se despidió de un oficial soñoliento que estaba en la puerta de salida. Salió cargando una caja que a pesar de su volumen parecía no estar tan pesada. Al llegar a su camioneta, Pamela volteó cerciorándose que nadie estuviera cerca. Sacó de la caja la maleta y la metió a su cajuela. Después, encendió el motor y emprendió su camino. Yo tenía las manos en las llaves del auto, listo para seguirla.

Ella no es más que una mujer romántica. Toda su vida, desde niña, le gustaba imaginar galanes, príncipes, héroes, superhombres, semidioses y quijotes que la rescataban y la besaban violentamente. A su edad, todavía seguía soñando con esos personajes. La pasión más fuerte en su vida, estaba segura de eso, era asaltar equipajes y después, su parte favorita, imaginar a su propietario. Hacía conjeturas sobre su profesión, su edad, su físico, su moral, su personalidad, sus gustos en comida o en música, etc. Bosquejaba por horas el estilo de vida del dueño de la maleta. Pasaba días asombrándose de cada elemento que encontraba dentro de la maleta

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y soñaba, sí, soñaba y deseaba.

La seguí, sospechando que el camino que transitábamos era el que nos llevaría hacia su casa. Pamela conducía tranquila. El clima seguía siendo una cortesía. Los árboles tomaban vida con el viento. La luna estaba completa. Las estrellas incontables. La noche anunciaba algo.

Algunas veces la fantasía no es suficiente. Cuando a ella le gustaba lo que encontraba en la maleta y el perfil que había trazado del caballero, se decidía a ir en busca de él. Le llamaba con el pretexto de decirle que había encontrado a su paso una maleta extraviada que podía ser suya. Lo citaba en un restaurante, en el vestíbulo de un hotel o en algún lugar que tuviera intimidad. En la cita, cuando la realidad no correspondía con la fantasía, entregaba la maleta de inmediato y se despedía apresuradamente con la excusa de tener un menester urgente. Le dolían esos momentos. Eran ilusiones despedazadas, pero había otros días de suerte en los que la fantasía casi se igualaba con la verdad. El individuo estaba al nivel de su imaginación. Entonces la aventura seguía. Era el momento de propiciar una conversación, tomar un vino o un ron, detallar la forma en que encontró el equipaje, demorar la entrega de la maleta que por "olvido" la había dejado en la habitación del hotel en el que "se estaba hospedando". No pocas veces

el esfuerzo había valido la pena y su pasión se satisfacía. Terminaba en la cama con el "príncipe" en turno, imaginando que hacía el amor por primera vez. En numerosas ocasiones, ellos le pedían sus datos para estar en contacto con ella y volverse a encontrar. Ella les daba siempre un número falso. En su mente sólo estaba el momento de secuestrar otra maleta. Se sentía completamente feliz. Se hallaba engolosinada con el momento.

Llegamos a una calle donde había casas solemnes, decoradas con dignidad y recato. Me estacioné a una distancia apropiada para evitar que Pamela me reconociera. Me bajé del coche y me escondí detrás de un árbol. Pamela se bajó de la camioneta, abrió la cajuela y se quedó contemplando la maleta que tenía escondida. Cerca de ella, encontré la sombra de un gato sobre el jardín. Viendo la sombra, me imaginé unos meses atrás a Pamela mirando mi maletín en su cajuela. El ruido de ésta cerrándose me despertó y vi cómo Pamela se dirigía a la puerta de su casa. Antes de que llegara a poner las llaves, la puerta se abrió y salieron dos niños corriendo a abrazarla. Detrás de ellos, apareció un hombre para recibirla y darle un beso ligero. La sospecha se había sincerado. Cerraron la puerta y la euforia de los niños se apagó. Me recargué fatigado en el árbol. La vida pasaba y el gato ahora estaba lamiéndome el zapato. Extrañamente, ya no veía su sombra.

"A Fool's Hand" (*excerpt*)

Biruk Eyesus

North Side, 2012

They measure the depth of a cobra's den with a fool's hand.

--An Ethiopic Expression

My name is Eyayu. Most of my friends call me "Eyu." I'm an Ethiopian.

"Ahehe!! I pity the fool," someone once said. Where had I heard that...in Ethiopia? It seems Ethiopic, to me personally, to label someone else, any arbitrary person other than the self, but never the Abyssinian, as the fool.

Our Soul is a great warrior, a sour loser, always bent on finding answers, solutions, relevant

explanations to anything and everything. It is at war or sex (with the lights on or off), wars of the sexes, times of great sadness or joy that I notice the presence of my soul. When I do, I start to ask myself about what I saw, what I thought I saw.

Here is a heated argument: What is solid but not a lingering thought, a Word? What is here and not in the afterlife, a Soul? Who is considered defeated but not a fighter, a Fool? Is truth the knowledge produced by the elitist? Or is it the belief which keeps a fool on solid ground with word, soul and body intact?

Enat, that's Amharic for mom, when I was only thirteen used to call on me to come closer saying, "Ante Qille, Na Wedih." She would sit me on her knees and wrap my small fingers inside her brown, dark and coffee colored warm hands, which

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had always the hint of smell from the freshest onions she minced in the morning and the coffee she had roasted for her afternoon coffee time. She would tell me, her second born, to have a purpose in life and that I should act in such a manner and as fit for me to survive. I would listen, looking in to those eyes that are filled of so much love, those two large and watchful contemplators of my journey in life, those that I have not seen for almost seven years now. I would of course looking straight into them get confused. It was because I'm a fool. I would only assume she meant well.

When I was seventeen...

I had a lecture from *enatye*, while she still had me under her protective arms, while she still had my father for comfort and consolation when the roads got rougher. This was way back when my flight to the U.S. was scheduled for the next day. I was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She spoke to me concerned, yet it did not seem as if she was speaking about me: The worst thing a soul can aspire to be is an observer.

Now, twenty seven years old and right in the middle of life – isn't that how it always feels, right in the dint of it all – looking in to my soul with much fright, looking within its dimmed lights of hope and closed window, I wish she hadn't said those words, and I wish I hadn't heard those words. In the past it seemed like just another simple statement; but right now, at this very present, it is what defines me.

A normal guy, with a very pleasant childhood, I, though without want, have turned into an observer, and a mere fool: a coward.

Before becoming the silent observer, never having the courage to speak, more yet SCREAM! ...of what I am going through, by doing so would in due process unburden me from what haunts me to my grave; before accepting fate without giving it a fair fight, before embracing a life so purposeless, I learned to restrain my soul. I learned to command it to keep its voice down, by shushing it to whisper, and slowly with bitter defeat to silence.

And in silence will I find peace? In restraint will I find comfort and solace?

A restraining rule such as the one I had

placed upon myself is very difficult to liberate from. Once I have found a way to arrest my soul, bind its active hands and wandering legs with alligator skin ropes. Then it is tamed, turned against my own self or what's left of it from the grim effect of alcohol, drenched in a sweat that has been salted with futile struggle. There is no better restraint than the fear of losing. To not lose if I do not fight, am I a fool or a coward? I no longer had my hands stretched out to pluck the apple, neither of my legs free to stomp into puddles.

So here, this is me, living in Chicago, My father had died three months ago. Well, there it is, I have lost. I am writing about it now. I'm not really doing a good job at addressing his death, but rather I'm addressing some other issue that will move my wheels, move me so that I won't be idle for the rest of my life.

Even before my father's suicide, my steps had already lost their voice. I consoled myself with false truth: nothing is going to happen, life goes on, and you know so and so. What a sweet retreat it is, a dreamy state. Not to wake up. I drank a lot of liquor, whiskey and gazed at the fleeting truth. In such a way, or because of such false truths, I felt at ease. My imprisoned soul accepted its way of life.

Just like a prisoner born behind fences, or a fool as the saying goes watching chimpanzees damage the banana trees in his farm, false truth glued me to the ground.

I never run from my past, or fight to keep a lover, or struggle to feed my kids; for I have no ghosts that haunt me, or a lover that is drifting, and I sure do not have kids.

After my father's death, I have become passive. Until today. Today, I am writing this personal letter but what that really means is not yet clear to me. It has been a long time since I have seen my mother. Today marks my seventh year anniversary outside of my country, apart from my beloved family.

If *enate* sees who it was that I have become, her heart would sink in sadness. Ughh!! To kiss the knee of defeat! What a shameful act, an act of a fool, that of a surrendering coward. Isn't foolishness the acceptable mediocre lamentable existence, where

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extreme measure are not taken, even more any small measure seems too heavy a task, and everything is considered but not acted upon? Isn't that what Ethiopic cowardice attests to? Isn't that what my father did?

Like my mother always used to tell me, the best thing you can be is a person of action: a monumental change creator, a ground shaker, a redeemer of many lost souls, a revolutionary, a *Tedros*: a fighter. The worst thing you can become is not a loser, but a fool: a coward. I had reflected upon these thoughts once if not twice within the past year, and ever persistently, it resonates – like the annoyance of the false jolly songs of Christmas in the winters (for what warmth does light, man made light and decoration bring into a deadly cold Chicago winter?) – more so due to the unexpected finality of my father.

Someone, possibly an Ethiopian once said, in that far away fairytale of a land, "Ahehe! I pity the fool!" And I agree in bitterness.

"Longest Journey"

Sylvia Taylor

South Side, 2012

I wanted to get to Chicago from Carbondale as soon as possible. I decided to go with my friends Peabody and Max. Peabody piloted a small plane. I believe our estimated time was 2 hours.

The weekend we chose turned out to be a stormy one. My friend Mattie drove me to the airport and tried to encourage me not to be scared. She didn't succeed. She left me at the airport, after telling me she had to go out to her car and would be right back.

Peabody assured me that he valued his life. He would not take any chances with his, mine, or Max's. He filed his flight plan and we waited for clearance. When clearance was granted, I squeezed in the back with Max's guitar. The guitar took up

most of the space. A Volkswagen Beetle was larger than the cabin of this plane.

The storm continued. He had to fly low. I saw the grass, not just the green. I saw the tractor and could spot its dents. I saw a farmer and his red checked shirt and denim overalls. All along this bumpy ride, I became more and more terrified. Peabody and Max continued to try and calm me down. I knew what it meant then to really want a drink. I meditated and prayed that it was not our time to leave this world, especially since we would be in the sky.

We landed in Charleston to file another flight plan. I didn't know how I would get from the airport to the train station anyway. It had now been 8 hours since we left Carbondale. Driving the speed limit to Chicago by car usually took 6 hrs. We got clearance and re-boarded. Another flight plan had to be filed in Champaign.

The journey to Champaign was just as bad. The plane was still zigzagging and bouncing in the air. I was beyond a nervous wreck. I promised myself that if I got off this plane again, I would not be getting back on. I made myself go to sleep. I woke up because the last bump was so strong it caused the guitar to hit me on the side of my head. Peabody was preparing to land.

I told him I could not handle getting back on that plane. I was afraid. I didn't want to lose my life or my mind. They would not be able to drag me on it. I had to get to the closest thing smoking. It turned out to be the bus. I'm not sure how I got to the bus depot.

The clock started ticking again. The bus ride took another 4 hours. This expected 2 hour journey totaled up to a 12 hour journey. I've been on trips that took longer - from Rio to Los Angeles and from New York to Dakar, but nothing took longer than this trip from Carbondale to Chicago.

Using Photography to Tell Your Story

Sometimes it is difficult to get just the right words written to the blank page. Sometimes you exhaust yourself as you attempt to make someone understand what you are saying. Sometimes the words just do not exist to convey the message you want to speak to friends, family, and colleagues.

The Illinois Humanities Council and the Puffin Foundation has made it possible, through their generous support, for Kay Yang and myself to offer the Photo-Telling Workshop to Odyssey Project alumni. One of the goals of the Photo-Telling Workshop is to help the photographer student to communicate experiences, beliefs and emotions through the visual image.

Photo-Telling is like photographic memoir. In a few pictures you can tell the world who you are, what you are about, what concerns you, and/or what you want to celebrate. No college credit is given in this workshop, but students do receive a certificate of completion, and each will receive an exciting opportunity to participate in a photographic exhibition of their visual story.

---Nia Gabrielle



Photograph by Nia Gabrielle

Be sure to check out our next edition to see photographs taken by Odyssey alumni during this exciting, student-led workshop!

Event Spotlight: Open Mic Night



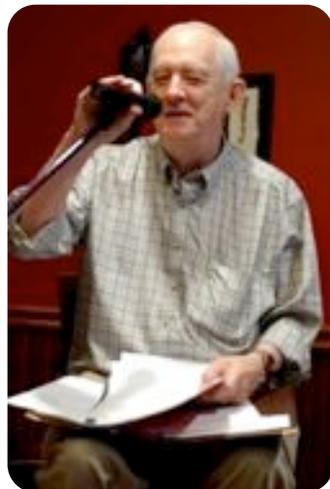
Graduates John Brady and Pennie Brinson (above) watch the performers. Pennie also read her own poetry and sang an original song for the event.

On Thursday, July 12th, former Odyssey Project students, family and friends gathered at Lincoln Park’s Galway Arms Irish Bar and Restaurant for the first ever Odyssey Open Mic Night. The event was inspired by this summer’s Creative Writing Workshop, where Odyssey graduates worked for four weeks on developing original poetry and prose. With an audience of over 40 and close to 20 performers reading their own creative works, reciting monologues and classic poems, and even singing original songs, the evening was a great success. The energy in the room was magnetic – fueled by the talent, creativity and willingness to share of the Odyssey Project community.

Intergenerational Talent!



Top left: Recent graduate Jamie Golden reads an original short story about adjusting to college life, which inspired much laughter from the audience.



Top right: Odyssey Graduate John Dick reads an original satirical poem about Henry David Theroux.



Right: Recent graduate Biruk Eyesus (far right) reads an Ethiopian folk tale.



Graduate Rita Falcon (above) reads original poetry while her daughter, Amorita, recites a monologue from Chekhov’s The Seagull.

Right: South Side writing tutor, Sara Cole, and summer intern, Anna Burch, watch the performers.



Event Spotlight: Kaleidoscope Family Day at the Art Institute

The Art Institute Kaleidoscope day was an interactive art experience where my family and I were able to act together and interact with artwork. For example, with the chessboard art, where we able to touch, feel and walk over the art piece. The activity that stood out the most for me was the jungle painting because every single member of our group was able to recreate the image by making jungle sounds. Each of us got the opportunity to make the sounds of animals, the water and wind. Additionally, the concert was a perfect transition from the painting, since it portrayed characters such as Elmo from "Sesame Street" and the painting "Starry Night" by Vincent van Gogh. Finally, we ended the program by creating art pieces that reflected the overall experience that we all had that day. It was very enjoyable, and we all had lots of fun deciphering the different art pieces we looked at while learning about the artist and piece.

--Meztli Santamaria, North Side 2012

The things I liked about our trip were touching and walking on the art piece. I also like the auditorium ceiling art piece and destroying the "Web of Lies." I also liked taking pictures with the lion, and making crafts, and looking at the small rooms.

---Mitzi Santamaria, age 10



Top left: Odyssey parent, Sandra, poses with Artie the Lion. Top right: Odyssey graduate Meztli Santamaria and family members Jamilet and Gabriela display their artwork. Below: Odyssey kids get to experience this piece of art by touching it (and later, dancing on it)!



Event Spotlight: All-Odyssey Reunion



John Dick, Tonya Mihailovna, Marybeth Southard, & Galyna Shoherban

Over thirty Odyssey Project graduates, faculty, family members, and friends braved the 100-degree heat and headed to Millennium Park on July 25 for the All-Odyssey Reunion. Alumni and faculty caught up, eating sandwiches donated from Corner Bakery along with a variety of delicious potluck snacks.

Luckily, the sun sank beneath the skyline, creating a cover of shade as the music began. Percussionist Martin Grubinger dazzled the crowd with his high-speed rhythms, accompanied by the Grant Park Orchestra, in their performance of Dorman's "Frozen in Time."

With the orchestra playing in the background, students shared their future plans, both academic and personal. One alumnus, Galyna Shoherban (pictured below), told us of her acceptance into John Marshall Law School, a first (as far as we know) for Odyssey graduates. We were also pleased to have Star Lawrence, President of the *Clemente Course in the Humanities*, with us, giving students the opportunity to talk with him in a casual setting.

Thanks to all those who attended! With the momentum we are gaining, next year's reunion is sure to be even bigger and better.



2012 Odyssey Project Graduation

The National Museum of Mexican Art was standing room only for the twelfth annual Odyssey Project graduation. On Saturday, May 26, Odyssey families and friends joined faculty, staff, and volunteers to support this year's graduating students. Welcomed by the music of Juan and Marco Garcia, attendees filed in. The ceremony was bilingual, thanks to interpreter Paula Bui, allowing both English and Spanish speakers to participate in the celebration.

It was an honor to have Angel Ysaguirre, the Deputy Commissioner at the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and former Director of Programs at the IHC, as keynote speaker. Drawing parallels between Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything that Rises Must Converge," Angel delivered a message about the role of tolerance and knowledge versus empty intellectualism.

Following his brilliant address, students John Brady (North side), Sandra Martinez and Refugio Tovar (Spanish language), Romana Kerns (South Side), and Valerie Walston (Bridge Course) delivered heart-felt messages to their fellow graduates about the role of the Odyssey Project in their lives.

Congratulations graduates! Following the sentiment of Angel's speech and in the final words of Prior Walter, the AIDs-afflicted prophet in *Angels*, "You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you: *More Life*. The Great Work begins." Completing the Odyssey Project course is a great accomplishment, but it is only the beginning; continue on in your journeys for knowledge and understanding.



Top: Graduate Precious Crawford and crowd cheer during John Brady's speech



Above: The Garcia brothers



Right (Above): Graduates

Right (Below): Graduate Tené Buckner and family



Below: Graduate Marco Garcia and Lizzie Krontiris, North Side Tutor and Student Life Coordinator



Above: Families of South Side graduates cheer while capturing photos
Left: Paula Bui interprets Angel Ysaguirre's address

Acknowledgements



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We would also like to thank Lindsay Atnip for capturing the moments you see here in the photographs.

We most certainly would like to thank the Odyssey faculty for their direct contributions to this publication and their continued dedication to the Project: Oscar Alatraste, Robert Buerglener, Jennifer Burns, Michael Burns, Irena Cajkova, Adam Davis, Juana Goergen, Curtis Hansman, Hana Layson, María Cecilia Lozada, Armando Maggi, Chris Mayo, Darrell Moore, Jacobo Myerston, Kathryn Oberdeck, Spencer Schaffner, Hilary Strang, Amy Thomas Elder, Charles Thomas Elder, Georgina Valverde, Hamza Walker, and Catherine Zurybida.

And finally, we extend our deepest thanks to the students for their hard work, their contributions, and their continued involvement with the Odyssey Project. Thank you all.



Anna Burch and Marybeth Southard
Odyssey Project Summer Interns



Top: IHC Executive Director Kristina Valaitis congratulates graduate.

Above: Odyssey Coordinators Amy Thomas Elder, Catherine Zurybida, and Irena Cajkova

Below: Bridge Course graduate Terri Watkins speaks with her teacher, Adam Davis



Contact Us

We would love to stay in touch! Please keep us updated with your most recent phone number, email address, and mailing address.

Feel free to contact Amy Thomas Elder, director of the Odyssey Project, at 312-422-5585 x 223 or amy@prairie.org.

If you are interested in submitting creative work for future publications, send emails to op-publication-submissions@googlegroups.com or mail to:

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If you are interested in being considered for an alumni spotlight, serving on the Alumni Editorial Board, or writing an event article, please contact Amy Thomas Elder.

Don't forget to check out our Facebook page, "Odyssey Project Course Chicago," for news and event updates!

Congratulations 2012 Odyssey Graduates!

Bridge Course: Marco Bakle, Jacqueline Finley, Juna Garcia, Marco Garcia, Nardos Germa, Charles Glass, Edward Horton, Joan Humphrey, Suzette Johnson, Elena Morris, Qae-Dah Muhammad, Christina Padilla, Carolyn Roundtree, Antonia Salinas, Valerie Walston

North Side: Yonatan Aguillar, Omelia Anderson, John Brady, Precious Crawford, Gene Davis, Biruk Eyesus, Toni Gray, Cathey Kasper, Misturat Ola Junaid, Marry Migisha, Elisheva Mulvaney, Janet Ramos, Stephanie Riley, Anna Santamaria, Meztli Santamaria, Juan Luis Tafolla Valencia, Karen Young
Honorary Graduate: Iesha Watts

South Side: Tené Buckner, Virgil Burgs, Philisha Collier, Otha Gaston, Jamie Golden, Honni Harris, Linda Haynes, Kwabena Jantuah, Lester Johnson, Romana Kerns, Regina Rollins, Sylvia Taylor, Chiquita Toby, André Wilson, Leturyurin Woods, Patrice Wynn.
Honorary Graduates: Davonda Buck, Wanda Fife, Julia Jones

Spanish Language: Jacqueline Alderete, María Santos Arroyo, Salvador Arroyo, Felipa Arroyo, Erika Camper McDowell, Arturo Castellanos R., María Emmerth, María E. Flores, Lourdes G. Gonzáles, Ana María Juárez, Robert A. Macias, Sandra Martínez, María G. Martínez, Gerardo Miranda, Carlos Adolfo Morales, María Muñoz, José Ordaz, Leonicio Pacheco, Lorena Ramírez, Elisa Rangel, Andrea Santiago, María Santiago, Refugio Tovar, Noelia Vasquez

