

Note from Capstone Director, Professor Leslie Donovan

Sam Shoemaker-Trejo's capstone project was to prepare and co-teach a 300-level Honor seminar titled *Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea* in the Spring 2018 semester. Sam and I came up with the idea of the course as a means to provide junior-level Honors student with advanced skills in research and communicating that research for public audiences. As a result, the artifacts or products that give evidence for Sam's capstone are somewhat different than those of other projects. Instead of performing original research, he read research on pedagogy and developed his own teaching style. He co-wrote the syllabus, co-prepared all in-class handouts and exercises, personally led 50% of our class sessions, commented on and collaborated in the grading of all assignments, and met with students individually. The artifacts collected here for future Honors Majors to consider are two works Sam was solely responsible for writing that somewhat summarize his capstone work and experience: a narrative story version of our more formal syllabus (distributed to students in the class after the formal syllabus had been discussed) and an end-of-the semester reflective paper summarizing the entire course.

Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea

by Samuel Shoemaker-Trejo

As a note to the reader of this syllabus: this story exists to clarify the structure and theory of the course, as well as to alleviate some of the malaise of the regular syllabus. It contains no dates or times, but I have bolded certain information that pertains directly to the order of assignments in the course. As such, I intend that this syllabus be used in conjunction with the more traditional one that Dr. Donovan and I presented to you at the beginning of Burning Life.

With that in mind, I ask that you attach your understanding of this course's structure to whichever version of the syllabus you prefer, but that you do consult the traditional thesis for the explicit versions of the expectations that Dr. Donovan and I hold for you. We do still expect you to complete assignments on the assigned days, and to ask questions as you need. But we do not ask that the process of this course should be boring or overly burdensome.

And so I hope you enjoy this short story. It's about you, in the now and in the future, and it paints a glowing picture of what you are able to accomplish. Take heart, because that is the estimation of you that Dr. Donovan and I already have.

Over the years of your early college career, you felt that you've explored many different topics of study. From the core subjects of the curriculum to several more complex and far reaching areas and fields, you've delved into various interests, ideas, and fields, and you've finally found something that you might like to study. This is your first step on your career path.

Even if only for a short time, you want to study the subject of your interest in depth. And for that, you need money, and for that, you need grants. And so you've come to the first major challenge: Create a work that makes it through peer review, one that will make potential funders want to give you the resources you need to accomplish your goals. And, being in college and having access to hundreds of resources, you are situated in just the right place to tackle this new objective.

Not only that, but you just found a class that focuses on the Promethean Idea, a nebulous platform of ideas that the course's professors assure you will help you to meet any practical goals you may set. Better yet, the course focuses on revision, and you're sure you'll need lots of it. You sign up for the course, and head into winter break.

On the first day of class, your professors hand out the syllabus and begin breaking down the course schedule. Ten minutes of minutia later, you find that **the first few weeks of the course will be composed of reading from the many books in the course, as the reading will drop off later**. You worry that you might not get the revision focus that you had looked for. However, you also see that **one of the first homework assignments, which you have three weeks to complete, is to generate subject ideas for a paper/project of your own creation and begin a thesis paragraph for that paper/project**. You dust off your ideas for your work, and begin to suss out your thoughts.

Over the next month, you work to craft a thesis between your reading assignments. The introduction to the academic paper form of your thoughts that your professors ask you to start with never seems to quite work out right, but the core idea holds your interest. And that is enough for the moment. In the meanwhile you learn the basics of the Promethean Idea. Starting with *Prometheus Bound*, by **Aeschylus**, you learn that Prometheus meant foresight in ancient Greek, and that the Promethean Idea involves belief in a goal, belief in human kind, and a specific story structure of triumph, failure and learning. You also go over the proper way to write a scholarly or academic paper. The prospect looks daunting.

You quickly reevaluate your choice of academia. But the initial interest you held to study a subject of your own choice remains firm. Fortunately, you have completed the books you needed to read at the beginning of the semester. You now begin work on your second assignment: finding research. You spend a day with the class as your professors pull you through a wealth of library resources that you never quite knew about and hope you remember later. And after class, still in the library, you squint at the fine print of a number of dense research books. The drops of insight you search for are few and far between, but, with the list of research terms you developed in class, you manage to find a few sources that look promising. **You add them to your initial list of sources, which, together with your preliminary research, constitutes your second class assignment.** You glance at the clock, then quickly rise and gather your things. The library will close in a few moments.

In the same week, your professors also call your attention to a troublesome idea that had already been at the back of your mind. The Promethean Idea, the subject at the core of your course, had felt very clearly like a perspective of privilege. You read Langston Hughes and Octavia Butler. Each seems like it could follow the Promethean structure, but your class in discussion dredges up the reasons that each work would be problematic if understood in a Promethean light. The discussions lead you into a new perspective on the course material.

Your professors also offer a discussion on the parts of the Promethean Idea that lend themselves to practical use, and also misuse. You discuss examples of politicians that have used the idea to justify legislations that lock minority groups into a negative public opinion. Your professors even ask you to question the worth of the course material itself, and ask you to converse over whether or not there can be merits to pursuing a philosophy based on what seems like a fallacy. The conversation leaves your head upturned. But the message of the class ultimately turns out hopeful, as so often discussions of the Promethean Idea seem to do.

That night, you think over all you have learned thus far. The thoughts that drift by both intrigue and disquiet you. And, to make matters more interesting, the syllabus reminds you that the first draft of your project is due soon.

Your professors told you that your arrival at your thesis was your first triumph, but that your first draft would be your first failure in the story structure of the Promethean Idea. That idea didn't quite sit well with you. The word "failure" seemed over-harsh. Even though you recognize "failure" as part of the triumphant path of the Promethean Idea that your professors described, you can't help but feel uneasy. Still, to give the benefit of the doubt to your professors, **you write your first draft with its attached works cited page.**

You also draw on your memory, as you listened closely during the class session earlier in the week where you discussed the factors that constitute constructive criticism. Each professor began with a question; the first with "What constitutes constructive criticism?" and the second with "What measures would you use to determine the ways in which the subject of your review is effective?" The answers of your class both remind you of familiar concepts and enlighten some new methods. You also find, in review of the syllabus, that **one fifth of your grade will be based on your review of the works of others in the class! Two other papers from the class will be yours to review after the completion of your draft,** according to your assignment specifications. They come to you quickly after you submit your own draft. You edit them thoroughly, and ensure that you provide feedback in accordance with your class' standards. Then, for a brief moment, your worry over the initial draft slips behind another assignment.

Each week of the class thus far, your professors had required you to meet with a research group composed of yourself and two other students. But this week, each group has a special assignment. Your group finds a quiet corner of Zimmerman Library and begins to write out a goal, an ultimate goal for the class, on a page of notebook paper. When you are done, you pass your page along to another of your group members, and you take the other's. Then business proceeds as usual.

The assignment your professors gave you was to become the keeper of your research partner's goal. The idea terrifies you. **You know you will need to write some responses that indicate the successes of your partner along their goal,** and you worry that you might not have enough observational skill to fulfil the assignment. Still, there it stands on the syllabus. You make sure to keep your partner's page in a readily available place.

"We are all our harshest critics," your professors say, "and there are few people who can really track their own progress toward their goals intuitively. The exercise we have given you will reveal your growth at the end of the first project process." You hope they are correct.

The first draft you wrote comes back a few days later. All five copies return covered with marks and comments. You take a moment to stare at the abrasive color palate, and you feel for an instant as though your professors and classmates may have no belief in you. Then your professors speak: "We consider your first draft a failure in the Promethean story cycle because it reveals to you, in much the same way that the birth of Frankenstein's monster does to Victor, that the shining object of your pride can have flaws. The label of "failure" in the Promethean lexicon is actually therefore more aptly another kind of triumph, a realization that your work of pride can be even better; also, it duty-binds you to find the next level of excellence, the next plateau. Now, have a look at your critiques before we go on."

You begin to read, and quickly, you realize that the notes you have received are not nearly as negative as you once thought they might have been. The rest of the class has clearly taken the review process that the group arrived at seriously. **Each of your reviewers has given detailed in-line copyediting review, as well as an overall assessment of your paper's performance according to the method your class came to.** Their comments validate the strengths of your first work, and also point out the places in which it does not hold water.

Some of the holes in your work leave you to feel a bit sheepish. You realize that you have spelled several words incorrectly, deviated from the support structure of your thesis on occasion, and have not always supported your claims.

"None of the errors you see should surprise you." The voices of your professors float once again into your reverie.

"Each of you has rendered a first draft. And that is exactly what you have before you. A first draft is the result of your initial impressions, your simple words. The idea of a "first draft" implies that there will be more. The next draft will polish what you have done here. However, what we would like you to do for the second draft is to start with an entirely blank page and write a new paper. The central idea should be the same, but the work must be new. To help you along, **we will also assign an annotated bibliography and outline of your project due in the next week before your second draft.**" This is the challenge we pose to you: show us that you can improve upon the foundations you built. You leave with a feeling of purpose, trepidation gone.

As you eat lunch in the SUB not twenty minutes later, you skim the internet for new sources. The task comes easier to you now. The databases reveal their secrets; a quick trip to the library yields yet more resources, and you even send an email to an expert in your field with a request for some insight. You already have a new list of resources by the time night falls. The warm sense of satisfaction fills the air until you remember with a jolt that your other homework still remains!

Over the course of the week, you perform activities in class that reinforce the Promethean cycle's practical applications. The professors also introduce the concept of realizable goal-setting, and open the floor to discussion of another nebulous aspect of the Promethean Idea: Promethean goals. The discussion reminds you of the original reason you started out in the class. You wanted to study a subject

of your own choice, to seriously pursue an interest that you find fascinating. The thought revitalizes you. Your objective fresh in mind, you start out to pursue **the second draft of your project.**

Soon, **the day comes for the return of your second draft, with all of its notes and responses.** This time, you receive four copies, one from one of the professors, and two from your research mates. You open the envelope and see, unsurprisingly, that the tide of colored marks and comments has not yet stemmed. This time, your feedback includes notes on even larger concerns.

Among them, you find a note that reads: “I like the thesis, and the support for your claims comes off very convincing. Also, I did have a question to go along with my assessment. Have you considered an alternate form for the project? I wondered whether or not you had experimented with other mediums to present your case. If not, I’d love to see if one or another catches your eye.”

The thought sticks in your head after class. The academic paper, the short story, the visual art piece and statement, the graphic analysis; your professors went over all those forms and more at the start of your conceptualization process. You created your own blend and idea from at that time. However, the comment you see before you now causes you to stop and question whether or not you made the most effective choice. You spend the evening mulling over your project and its possible forms. As you fall asleep, you come to a decision about the form of your final draft.

The next week melts into a blur as you work with a degree of hereto untapped urgency. **You meet with your research group and set about the final tabula rasa revision of your research project.** You go to classes. You eat and sleep. You try to relax. Still, the storm front of your final revision approaches. And so you work.

Then, it arrives: the due date of your final revision. On that day your professors invite you to give a brief presentation of your work. The other members of the class stand and give a brief overview of their work and their process. Some cite large revelations, moments of inspiration. Others share tales of a continual grind against a wall of difficult decisions. However, all of the final presentations appear to come together in a very presentable, professional manner. Then, your turn arises.

You stand, and all of the faces in the class look at you expectantly. Without much thought, you begin. “Your professors’ instructions rise once more to the surface: this is an opportunity to share something that you take pride in. Have fun!” **There is no grade attached to the presentation after all.** Soon, you find that you’ve made it through, and the class applauds. Some questions come in, and you answer in a daze. The realization sets in: you’re really done.

Afterward your professors ask you to pull out the goals sheets that your classmates gave you at the start of the course. They prompt you to write a last update. The paper stares at you, blank and imposing. But you write. You write the best praise you can muster while you wrack your brain for more indications of your partner’s success. Suddenly, your professors ask you to put your pencils down and pass your page.

You receive your paper with trembling hands. Questions flash in the empty space of your mind. Is this really still my goal? What did I intend here? Did I really improve that much? Then you begin to absorb the words on the page. You see the concrete ways in which you grew, and also feel a bit of a swell of pride. For the first time since the beginning of the class, you realize that you might actually have moved forward and taken a step toward your ultimate goals.

Years later, you sit in your office with a cup of your preferred beverage and a copy of an old class syllabus. It is mid spring, but the work that had steadily piled across your desk over the course of the season has finally cleared away. You sip your drink and enjoy the quiet, which abruptly shatters as your

phone summons you from the other end of your desk. The class syllabus for Burning Life, much dog-eared, finds its way to the surface before you and you manage to fumble the phone into your hand.

After you listen to the caller for a moment, you manage to gather that the person on the other end of the line is a representative of an organization called TED. Their organization is familiar to you from the syllabus of the course you had just glanced over. **You had, at one time in college, to produce a TED talk** on the subject that you have now become recognized for.

The representative says that they have come across your work as they read a local newspaper, and that they would like to formally invite you to speak at the main TED festival. Stunned, you accept. The TED representative eagerly delivers information to you, and the note pad next to your keyboard soon fills with shorthand dates and times. As the phone call ends, you consult the old course syllabus you kept from your course. A smile briefly graces your lips.

The idea that the TED festival organizers now expect you to speak to hundreds, if not thousands, of people draws out a tension in your gut that you haven't felt in some time. You recognize the feeling as nervousness. For several years, you have been an expert in your field. The TED audience, however, will not know to treat you as an equal, will not recognize the more technical aspects of field of knowledge, and will not have more than ten or so minutes to absorb what you have to tell them. And yet they will come with the expectation that you give them some bit of insight! You recognize a part of the old Promethean cycle that Burning Life taught you about once more: failure. In this case, you feel you have grown complacent, and you resolve to face the new challenge and welcome the chance to grow.

The process reflects that of your preparation for the project that you took on for the second half of the semester of your old Burning Life course. **You begin your efforts by collecting comments that others have written about your work.** The local newspaper article that the TED organizer saw provides a ready start. Your scholarly reviews provide another source. Various other sources of outside perspective also reveal themselves over the course of your research. Finally, that night, you curl up on your favorite chair and begin to read through a printed packet of your previous comments.

The comments reveal what your readers liked about your work, what they wanted to see more of. You begin to pick through and see what an uninitiated audience might be able to understand and appreciate. You pick through the material and find a sizeable reservoir.

To move on, you travel back to your office and book up your computer to produce **an outline of your TED talk.** You practice in front of mirrors, building on what seems well founded and ripping away what is not useful. Each progressive review of your notes yields more useable information. Ultimately, you come up with a decent outline of your talk. The time is not exactly precise, the material is loose, but you feel like you have a structure to what you have to say rather than just a jumbled list. The results please you well enough to allow you to go to sleep, and you welcome rest from the day's hard work.

While you wait for sleep to take you, you try to remember the many TED talks the professors of Burning Life asked you to watch. The talks came in many different mediums and in a wealth of different subjects; the only uniform accomplishment you can recall that held them all together seemed to be that they all had a strong structure. You remember that the structures of the talks took as many forms as the talks themselves did, but each held up the form and substance of the speakers words in a way that allowed the audience to get a foothold in what they wanted to say. You reach out and scribble a quick note on your bedside notepad to remind yourself of that important revelation, then sleep overcomes your capacity for awareness.

Now that you have a week's worth of preparation under your belt, you commission a friend with a good camera to help you prepare. You ask them to film you in the gym of a local community center that you arranged to use earlier in the week. The video will be reminiscent of the way in which TED films the talks at its central festival, and you hope that it will provide you some insight into the areas that you might still need to work on. **After all, it did when your professors spent a day filming the class' first stab at your talks before the actual presentations came around.**

You have had the first revision of your outline in hand for long enough that you are confident in your ability to perform your work with little aid from paper. And so you stand in front of the camera as your friend raises their hand in a thumbs-up. You begin to perform your piece. The imaginary audience fills the rest of the small gym, but you push the image so that it extends much farther. Your outline provides you with a solid foundation, and you flesh out its skeleton with the language that you draw to mind in the moment and from practice.

The ten minute mark rings out just as you finish speaking. Your friend kills the video, then walks it over to you. As the sun has crested high overhead, you offer to take your friend to lunch as a break. They accept. Even then, however, you don't entirely let the business of the day go. Their feedback is as valuable to you as the video, as the friend you chose is an effective layman in your field. And so you ply them, over coffee and food, to tell you what they thought. Your friend thinks back for a moment, and you come up with a few specific questions to ask.

After an hour of questions, answers, and notes, your friend begs their excuses to work on their own projects and leave you with the SD card containing your video. The end of your meal and the drive home dissolve into the morbid curiosity and nerves that accompany watching yourself on tape. But you soon find yourself in your desk chair in front of your computer. You wait for it to boot and absently thumb the smooth surface of the SD card. You hope to find something workable. After all, the TED talk will be in a little over a week.

Finally, your computer boots. Eagerly, you log in and shakily place the SD card into the reader on the side of your monitor. The SD card loads, and you select the most recent video from the list. Your media player struggles for a moment, a time that forces you to feel the clenched-gut sensation that accompanies worry that the file might be corrupted, but eventually loads the file. You watch as it begins to play.

After the copious notes you wrote, the video that you watched over and over, the nights of structural analysis around your regular work schedule, the time for the TED conference lies one day away. You take the time to reflect after you stumble upon the old class syllabus for *Burning Life* that you lost under your research notes early in the process of your TED preparation. You think on the story structure that your professors outlined so long ago. You feel certain that you have found the end of the "learning" phase of the Promethean structure.

The structure has been useful to you as a metaphor to understand the revision process over the years. It helped you produce your first paper, to hone your skills in the face of criticism from your peers. It helps alleviate the pressure to succeed that you felt then, and even somewhat now. You cover the phases of the story structure of the Promethean Idea and relate them to the process of your TED preparation.

You see the call to speak as your major triumph, as recognition that you had expertise in your field to offer. You recon that your "failure" came when you drafted up your first outline; you had to wonder how you would be able to express all that information to a crowd of neophytes in your area in the small limit of ten minutes when you had so far only managed to put down a stream of consciousness on paper. You also know that the learning step came in the face of all the subsequent process of refining your work. And triumph... Only the next day would tell. But you feel the swell of pride that comes, oh so familiar; at a job well done, a work well completed. You look over the venue information, the times. You are ready.

Samuel Shoemaker-Trejo

The Things We Burn

Burn Excitement

January 16th, 2018. The class had filled to capacity the day before, so I was expecting the classroom to be full. What I wasn't prepared for were the eighteen replicated faces of expectancy. I tried hard to look at them without turning away. I only partly succeeded. My chair was out from under the table by the next time I had a cogent thought. The faces remained. *Somewhere in the next hour and a quarter, I'll get used to it*, I thought. For the moment, there were other things to do.

I pulled out my lesson plan for the day while Dr. Donovan settled in at the far end of the circle. The copies of the class syllabus she carried were shifting around on her, so I turned to the students. We exchanged some preliminary greetings and I made an effort to look everyone in the eye. Time dilated as I tried to keep the muscles in my cheeks from locking while I smiled. The eleven-o'clock hour kept getting farther away. But time did eventually intrude into my nerves. The minute hand ticked past the twelve-o'clock mark, and the first session of *Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea* began.

“Good morning, all!”

To complete my major in Honors interdisciplinary liberal arts through the UNM Honors College, I took on the thesis project of co-teaching an Honors class. My faculty mentor, Dr. Donovan, and I decided that I would design an original course to satisfy my thesis requirement. I would later come to title that course *Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea*, and it would serve as an experiential attempt at unlocking the practical applications of storytelling. That subject was also the focus of my major. And the experience of the course did lead me to a certainty that there are practical benefits to storytelling. For one, storycraft is a foundational

activity, by which I mean that those who are in the market for new ideas to solve new problems can use storycraft to create innovative solutions. Storytelling can also be used in five practical ways to produce various benefits; the five ways are metaphor, mantra, hope, idol, and empathy. Given my findings in my class, the implications of storytelling now span both the practical realm, and can be argued to be as much of a practical study as any STEM subject.

Burn Ingenuity

I first read *Prometheus Bound* in high school. Dr. Knapp, the English teacher who assigned it, also introduced me to *The Great Gatsby* and Goethe's *Faust*, and reintroduced me to *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. But for many years since he did, I had left the story on the back burner. I was still interested, but I had more pressing matters, like an attempt to begin college, on my mind. But, as many humans of similar years have done, I had come of the age where I began to earnestly search for meaning in my life.

In so doing, I turned back to literature, social interaction, and news. Granted, that did not immediately turn me back towards the story I had fallen in love with so many years ago. The idea to identify with a particular tale had not yet come over me. Still, the connections between my life and the story of Aeschylus' heroic titan only grew. I reached for self-betterment, self-efficacy, and freedom. I wanted only to make something of myself. And, by that time, I could articulate and understand those goals. But before I could relate those wants back to the story of Prometheus, I determined I would study them directly.

The major application I first wrote for the University of New Mexico Honors College contained a thesis based around a class on personal happiness. What would it take to teach people to be happy, I wondered? The question seemed to hit all of the points I had tried to reach for myself. But it was in the pursuit of that question that I found my reconnection to the Promethean Idea. The triumph of reaching for goals, no matter the level of their attainability, was

a piece of the Promethean Idea that I had long admired. And since happiness was one such goal, I keyed back in to that original story. And in so doing, found that I had come across a much more complete area of interest in the human condition to explore.

My origin story for my thesis brings up an important point in the world of storytelling. Stories are foundational, not predictive. One easy example is the internet. Humanity had not conceived of a world-wide-web to think to build one until the cyberpunk genre of speculative fiction began to perpetuate ideas from stories like *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson. Without someone conceptualizing the idea, inventors and entrepreneurs would have taken much longer to conceptualize a similar idea on their own. In my own work, the principle of foundational storytelling is equally easy to observe.

The story of Prometheus Bound actually preempted both my worries and my course design. It did not predict them, as if both were set in the future at some fixed point and the story looked forward to them. Rather, Prometheus Bound shaped the conditions through which I underwent my thought processes before the class. For one, the idea that one can take joy in the search for success first comes from that early text of Prometheus. My ideas were shaped from it and informed by it. The story did not appear because Aeschylus had insight into my future. Rather, my work appeared because his laid asked questions and gave answers that I decided to pick up and carry forward on my own.

Burn Energy

I sat down to view the set of TED talks Dr. Donovan had given me to look over. I had considered a quick view of each video, which would take far less time to accomplish than otherwise, but it was already after midnight. There would be no point in an attempt to shorten the time I spent on each video. I had quite a bit more left to accomplish; I would not be able to salvage any sleep, even if I did find try to contract my viewing time.

The first few TED talks of the batch were interesting, and good, as far as the usual quality of TED talks goes. All would be useable to demonstrate effective TED talk techniques to my students. But none had really gripped me with excitement yet. *Oh well*, I thought, *they'll be serviceable. I don't need them to walk on water.*

Then I clicked on an innocuous link near the bottom of Dr. Donovan's email. It was the penultimate TED talk she had sent me, and I had saved it for last, as it sounded most interesting to me. Titled *The Happy Secret to Better Work*, the video opened onto a typical TED stage: a red, circular carpet, a power point screen, and a waist-high table. On the ever-present red carpet, speaker Shawn Achor began with a story from his youth. He had been playing with his sister when he accidentally knocked her off of a bunk bed. She landed on all fours, on the broken arm she had sustained playing with Achor not the week before he tipped her to the floor. Seeing her about to cry and alert their parents, Achor said that he did what any rational person would do and told her that, because she had landed on all fours, she must clearly be a unicorn. His sister changed almost instantly from crying in pain to joyous.

Achor went on to describe what psychologists refer to as the happiness advantage—a concept that posits that one must place one's happiness before success. He use the formula of the story he told as a metaphor to explain the principles of that psychological concept. Had he not done so, his audience, myself included, might have been left confused or in doubt about the validity of his claim. But he had instead assured that they were anchored to his base idea in a clear and simple way. I was impressed. I resolved to underscore metaphor as a communicative teaching tool.

That night during the course of *Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea* was the time at which I formally locked in one of the most easily grasped practical elements of storytelling. That element is metaphor. Metaphor is a teaching tool. Humans use it all the time to learn new

ideas efficiently. It is easy for a person to grasp a new concept if it can be placed in a familiar context. There are two ways to approach any given process. The first is algorithmic; a person trying to solve a problem attempts all possible solutions and arrives at a tenable solution through that process. The second is a system of shortcuts. A person trying to solve a problem uses a pattern that has worked once and makes slight modifications in the face of a situation that seems similar to a previous one in the hopes that the two are sufficiently similar to achieve a satisfactory result. Metaphor acts primarily in the second tract, but also leaves room for algorithmic experimentation given that the subject of a metaphor is, both one's own experiences and not. That means that metaphor acts as a bridge between algorithmic and the shortcut style thought patterns. That, by extension, means that metaphor cuts the time one needs to create a more accurate solution to a problem.

Burn Sleep

The birds were so loud. At six a.m., that was all I could think. I had graded most of the papers by three, and there was a half-cocked attempt at rest somewhere in the last hour or four, but I had been awake long enough that I was only after sleep now. All two hours that I would get. But there was an incessant obstacle. The birds were awake. They had been for a while now. I tried to blank out the noise, but it wouldn't work. The world was waking around me. Who was I to ignore the trend? After all, I still had to brush my teeth, floss, and work into bed clothes. How was I ever going to get to bed?

One step. The thought came unbidden. *Just one foot in front of the other.* I placed a foot forward. *One step.* I shifted my weight onto it. *Just one foot...* My other foot overtook the first. *Good.* I continued to mentally mutter as I tried to make sure my toothbrush reached the top of my outside left gums, where the dentist told me that I should be extra careful to brush. I would not wake up enough, until Thursday of that week to make the connection to the promethean idea,

but I had stumbled across another fundamental use of storytelling that I had employed for years before: mantra.

Rewind a month to the start of my class' projects, and one might notice that I had already applied mantra quite liberally. I always worried that when I told my students that they should start a new draft with a blank document that my repetition of the same old phrases would start to wear thin. And it did, with several of them. But one day, one of my senior students came in and expressed their gratitude for that new approach. They had worked on their thesis for some time by that point, and had hoped that the revision techniques we set out to learn in class would help them. They had, up to that point reached a sort of wall. But they took my advice and started a fresh document. They immediately began to see results. Their arguments were stronger. Their text was better written. And they had done it at the behest of an idea spurred on by the common repetition of images and ideas in *Prometheus Bound*. In the face of such a case, I find it hard not to believe that the role storytelling plays as it produces cultural mantras is unimportant in any way.

Burn Belief

"Is this too gimmicky?" There was that question again. I had to ask it aloud to Dr. Donovan one more time.

"It sort of feels that way, doesn't it?" She said. I couldn't think but to agree. The whole class was based around a metaphor, and I could feel the students slip away, day by day. Dr. Donovan and I had discussed the phenomenon before, but I was especially worried that day. We had been trying for days to keep the material we had covered at the beginning of the class fresh without an attempt to add more articles or books to the course load. But with no new assignments, we had only old concepts to return to. We simply hoped that we could revisit those old concepts in a new way. And our activity for that day was geared to do just that. I just hoped it would work.

At the classroom, I explained the activity with one of our prior texts as context.

“At the beginning of the semester, we read *Frankenstein*. If you recall, Shelly subtitled the book *The Modern Prometheus*. Today, we’re going to write out own modern versions of the story of Prometheus. Remember what you can of *Prometheus Bound*. You can work alone or in groups.” The usual dead fish eyes of my class and their silent grumbles took on a slightly different color. They were interested. I tried not to get my hopes up. But I could not help but wish that they would like the assignment.

Groups and pairs quickly formed. Some worked alone. One student suggested that they might write a rap! It became clear that they thought they had made a joke. I told them to seriously try it. They agreed. Then came the wait. I sat with Dr. Donovan for fifteen minutes. Many students were absorbed in a way that I had not seen in some time.

My apprehensions as to my students’ engagement began to fade away. And as my students finished and began to read their work, I grew content. One student turned the tale of Prometheus into a warm tale about a loveable dog. The student who proposed a rap delivered a delightful piece of humorous music. Another group provided a thoroughly modernized Prometheus who fought against super-corporations. All their tales grew the coals of a fire I had long since let die: hope. I knew then that the course would not end halfway through. My students could still be invested. And clearly they had found some of that same precious hope in their work.

The ability of stories to inspire hope in a population is second to none. If our literature reflects the hopeful, humans hope. If the opposite, so we despair. In my class, I saw that effect in myself and my students many times. In fact, one of the major lessons that I had tried to impart was that one can learn to find the continual search for self-betterment hopeful, that one can

believe in a goal even if it is seemingly unreachable. When I had my students write their own representations of the Prometheus myth, I saw that function of storytelling in action.

Burn Inspiration

My student peered around the corner of Dr. Donovan's office door.

"Can I come in?" they asked as they waved. I brought in a second chair, and we sat to talk through their question. As it turned out, the student had found herself stumped over the creation of their thesis. I had given the class the instruction to craft a radical thesis, by which I meant that they should choose a thesis that actually argued a point to their reader. The student who had come to see me did not yet understand what I meant by that.

I asked the student to read her work aloud. I asked them to look for sources of conflict in their writing. I even asked them to speak to me about any controversies in their field of studies outside the scope of their project that they knew about. But they still felt unclear, and did not seem to grasp the concept of a radical argument. But I held out hope that I could make my lesson clear. To that effect, I had one last tool in mind.

"Think about what Prometheus did when he angered Zeus. What was Prometheus arguing?"

"That Zeus was wrong to look down on humans."

"That's exactly right. And Zeus punished him for that. There's risk involved in a radical claim. It might make people angry. Do you see what I mean?" I could see the wheels begin to turn behind their eyes.

When they left that day, my student had crafted a much stronger thesis that they would eventually hone for their final project. The characters of the stories we read have the ability to become very real idols. A person can follow their examples and learn from their actions. I saw that particular trait exemplified in the ways students took small parts of Prometheus' practices and employed them to create more effective arguments and share information with sympathetic

ears. Without Prometheus as an idol, however, the students would be devoid of an example of why such activities were important.

Burn Patience

At the beginning of each class, I had always tried to say hello and ask how everyone was doing. On one particular morning, however, the students did not respond to my traditional check-in with more than grunts of affirmation. I had to wonder if I had asked too much of them. After all, I had assigned a large reading the night before, and they were sure to have felt the pressure.

What discussion could get them awake? I thought. There had been a discussion the last class period over whether or not Prometheus was a hero or not, and I had wanted to continue it. And from that root, I figured, I could forge a path to a wakeful class. Dr. Donovan came in, and the clock changed over to eleven a.m. Class began, and I introduced our discussion topic, a return to the question of Prometheus' heroism.

As we began, I steered the discussion to the students' personal values. I posed the question "What makes a person or character a hero?" very early. Students eagerly began to respond with their thoughts on Prometheus. The simple connection of his actions to theirs, or the departure thereof, stirred a curiosity within them. Some vied for Prometheus' position as a hero, and some were not sold. All identified with his love of humanity, his attempts to help the weak, and his long endurance. As each student spoke, I saw them warm up and noticed their admiration for the character of Prometheus grow. The effect was electric.

What I learned through that experience was that characters in stories on the page can have some of the same empathetic characteristics as characters on the stage. *Prometheus Bound* is, of course, a play, so I am not surprised that it carries on Aristotle's principles of arousal of empathy. But be it *Frankenstein* or any of our readings with a story, the most successful discussion approach always came through the students' ability to identify with a character. And

that empathy, once a student finds opinions within a character that differ from their own, drives them to develop.

Burn Passion

I stand before the audience that really matters, the audience of my peers and my professors.

The stage is entirely mine; the other majors have already spoken. They set the bar high. My fingers tighten somewhat on the podium I will soon speak from. I had planned on a straightforward presentation, like the one for WRHC in the moments before I walked up to where I now stand. But I reconfirm, now that I see the sea of expectant faces, that a different approach might land better here.

“If you like to listen to stories with your eyes closed, please do. Otherwise, do as you will, because I’d like to tell you all a story.”

At that point in my thesis presentation, I told the audience the story of Prometheus, as I saw it. I followed that with a brief discussion of what I had done with *Burning Life: Approaching the Promethean Idea*, and what I had learned from that process. I then answered some very enthusiastic questions. But the story was the part I think people got the most from. The audience could easily grasp how the story of Prometheus had preempted my class. They could also see that the five elements of the practicality of storytelling I had picked out of my class, metaphor, mantra, hope, idol, and empathy, had permeated my work on the class. So, I posit, can every reader of any story. They may not consciously key in to those ideas, but they definitely perceive them in action. My course experience has certainly further proven so. *Burning Life* comes to a close, but what I learned from it will live on. I hope that I will be able to carry the lessons I derived far into my next projects. After all, there is only one thing left to burn: time.